

Decolonial Embodied Historiography:
Female *Performing* Bodies, Revolutions and Empires in
Ethiopia

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Dedication

To

Emuye, Mami, Tereza, Mahlet, Hemen, Heran, and

Baba

Abstract

This dissertation is about the struggles of Ethiopian female performers like Telela Kebede, Asnakech Worku, and Merry Armde. It examines the resistance that women artists enacted on inter/national stages, in the nightclubs of red-light districts, and in their everyday lives. Ethno/national discourses take Hegelian and Rankean historiography for granted making identity politics the only avenue to citizenship/subjectivity. Deployed to create a neoliberal structure of belonging, this politics obfuscates multiple articulations of freedom particularly feminist struggles in the past and closes off epistemic and embodied multi-genre possibilities in the present (1991-2018). Using performance as a mode of thinking, as an object of analysis and as a site of struggle, my dissertation probes into the staging of a ‘burden of history’ that moves around in Ethiopian historiography just as an issue of *longue durée*. I argue that history needs to be interrogated as a colonial/modern discipline and profession. Then, I re-singularize the 1974 Marxist revolution to show how Ethiopian female performers articulated their desires in collaboration with male revolutionaries such as the prolific playwright and thinker Tsegaye-Gabre-Medhin. Though he staged Ethiopian socialism (negritude) to create possibilities, Tsegaye rendered female performers as ‘impure’ bodies that ‘obliterated’ the socialist progress because they had nightclubs in the red-light districts. These women fought to change their condition enacting tactical resistance on and off stage by expanding the notion of the performative and the political. In order to complicate the notion of ‘abject’ body, the dissertation genealogically looks into the emergence of the raced, classed, gendered, sexualized, commodified, and dis/abled female bodies at the beginning of the twentieth

century. Ethiopia's position as un-colonized yet colonized country (in terms of coloniality of power) informed participation of performance in the invention of dangerous liaisons and translations of governmentality. Nevertheless, female performers negotiated empires' (global-local) spatial segregation through multiple performances as other women of red-light districts joined the resistance as spect-actors. Using decolonial embodied historiography as a concept, method, and praxis, that attends to the undoing of the Eurocentric model of the human (Man), open spatiotemporal dialectics, and ethico-political act, my dissertation opens epistemic avenues to endlessly co-recreate a better humane world.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
Anti-Neoliberal but Neoliberal Choreography: De/Construction of the Ethnic-Developmental Subject	
CHAPTER ONE	15
Decolonial Embodied Historiography: What Can/Not Be Thought and Practiced?	
CHAPTER TWO	98
Staging Socialist <i>Progressive</i> Time: Female Bodies' Spatial Maneuvers in a Revolution	
CHAPTER THREE	198
Multiple Occlusions, Unending Moves: <i>Walking</i> in Between Seductions and Repulsions of Empires	
CONCLUSION	264
What is New in the <i>New</i> Beginning? Decolonial Co-Creations	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	299

INTRODUCTION

Anti-Neoliberal but Neoliberal Choreography:

De/Construction of the Ethnic-Developmental Subject

Background

This dissertation is about resistance that Ethiopian female performers enacted on inter/national stages, in the nightclubs of red-light districts, and in their everyday lives. It is about female artists' embodied struggle during the time of “socialist” revolutions (1974 and 1991) and global-local empires (Haile Selassie's feudal-bourgeoisie system, European colonial empire, and globalization in the present). My dissertation chiefly interrogates ethno/national mobilization of traditional history and “overrepresentation” of the past in the present (1991-2018) to expose how it silenced female performers and their histories (1920s-1970s). Yet I posit marginalized feminist struggles in the past neither as a story of sheer agency nor as a binary relation between distinct self (Men) and the other (Women). Rather, I draw attention to how these struggles should be seen within the interlocking and fragmentary social relations that are intersectional (capital/class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, dis/ability, etc.), intra-sectional (heterogeneity within gender, for instance), and trans-sectional (beyond Eurocentric/any ethnocentric model of identity).

Taking mainly performances in and outside of the state-owned theatres as sites of discursive, embodied and textual struggles, I argue that the current identity politics in Ethiopia contributes to the mis/representation (the tension in making an event intelligible)

of the past and deploys traditional history to create an oppressive socialist-cum-neoliberal economic and political structure of belonging. And to be more precise, the incumbent regime, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), and particularly its core party, the Tigryan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), has been using the discourse of ethno-nationalism, to conceal its economic hegemony in the national market through deliberate exclusion of other Ethiopians (Meles "Revolutionary Democratic Goals"; Berehanu "Parties in Business"; Vaughan and Mesfin; de Waal "Theory and Practice"; "Response to Lefort"; Lefort "Response to de Waal"). That results in, I argue, a double violence: First, the ethno/national representations, which made identity politics the only avenue to citizenship/subjectivity, obfuscate multiple articulations of freedom particularly feminist struggles in the past. Second, the ethno/national politics of wound and its positivist historiography close off plural epistemic and embodied possibilities particularly critical feminist options (that account for intersectional, intra-sectional, and trans-sectional power relations). This double violence calls for deconstruction of positivist historiography as a site of coloniality of power (raced, classed/capitalized, gendered, sexed, etc.) through interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary, and multi-genre methodology.

I want to seize fragments from the past and genealogically see: How *history* has been understood, staged and critiqued to legitimate and/or unsettle status quo? How would feminist struggles in the past speak to today's binary between ethnicity and class, the creation of a heteropatriarchal structure of belonging, and formation and choreography of ethnic-developmental (socialist-neoliberal) subjectivities in time-space?

What other struggles particularly feminist desires have been glossed over? What tensions, possibilities, and inequalities emerged amidst competing socialist ideologies during the 1974 revolution? What are the ways in which new (modern/colonial) logics of regulations and governmentality that invent, name, discipline, and govern what the state calls “impure female bodies” (since the beginning of 20th century)?

In order to answer these questions, in this dissertation, I explore the tensions, confrontations, and seductions between the global and local projects of modernity, namely, the seemingly anti-neoliberal but neoliberal ethno-national developmental structure of belonging (1991-2018), the 1974 nationalist socialist revolution, Haile Selassie’s anticolonial and feudal-bourgeoisie empire and European colonial modernity. In doing so, I intend to show how regulatory and governmental mechanisms of heteronormative colonial modernity bear on local articulations of independence and development. At the same time, I wish to uncover how these global-local complex relations, in turn, play out on the invention and reproduction of sexualized and commodified female bodies in manifold intricate ways. More important, I want to expose the ways in which female performers engendered creative dramaturgies of survival, resilience, and resistance within revolutions and empires. Thus, my dissertation maps the political in these performances of resistance (from within and against) that disturbs homogenization of time-space or linear temporality, the dichotomy between internal and external space, or a discursive-corporeal incarceration of the “impure” (‘contaminated-contaminating’) female body.

Decolonial Embodied Historiography: Theoretical Practice

I take a conceptual and methodological cue from the lived experience of the performing bodies I am engaging with who always move in the interstices of hetropatriarchal itineraries, take creative detours, and walk about any center of power. This allows me not to dwell on one disciplinary place/method but to traverse across theories that account for what I call decolonial embodied historiography. I posit decolonial embodied historiography both as a mode of thinking and as an epistemic critique of coloniality of history, which takes into account coloniality beyond territorial colonization and considers global-local nexus of power as raced, capitalized/classed, gendered, sexed, ethnicized, faithed, dis/abled, etc. In its critique of positivist history, this historiography builds on poststructural and postcolonial debates and argues that Hegelian and Rankean theory and methods of history (which still saturate academia in different guises) are always already colonial for they fix non-European others in time and place through colonial/modern conception of time-space. Decolonial embodied historiography is thus a critical praxis that accounts for inter-intra-trans-sectional embodied power relations and continuous multi-genre co-creations of new languages and humane life forms.

Marked, Thinking, Moving Bodies: Decolonial Method of Invention

Theatre is a popular culture in Ethiopia. In a country whose peoples speak more than eighty languages and around 85 % of the population live as farmers and pastoralists, performance, in multiple ways and genre, has been part and parcel of the people's lives for so long. Since the encroachment of global capitalism into Ethiopia and the seductions

and anxieties that colonial modernity presented to Ethiopian political leaders, intellectuals, professionals, and artists, theatre and performance have played big roles in shaping Ethiopia's political modernity as they have been shaped by it. The turn of the nineteenth century particularly the beginning of twentieth century Ethiopia witnessed and lived its experiences through performances too. Although the Ethiopian theatre scholarship has been obsessed with "genesis," the *azmari* performances (minstrelsy shows choreographed in new spaces like modern schools and hotels) and plays that were staged by Young Ethiopian Association, the then Mayor Hiruy and his sons, Tekle-Hawariyat Tekle-Mariam (who wrote Ethiopia's first constitution), and Yoftahe Nigussie, to mention but only few, played part in making the art form relevant to questions of modernity in Ethiopia. More important, performance has been one site where subjectivities have been constructed and contested. Ethiopian modern playwrights, actors, and directors have made the art forms visible and important so much so that the state loves the arts, as much it hates them.

This ambivalent relation has been a reality that cannot be ignored. Though they are mostly coerced, and coopted into the service of the state, many performers, writers, and directors negotiate the space in order to unsettle the status quo. They deploy ironies, symbolisms, translations, and send their hidden meanings through what they call – *semena work* (a pun like artistic-cum-epistemic enterprise that is used as a safety valve to negotiate the politics of 'speaking truth to power'). Yet, at this time-space, mostly light comedies and works subservient to the state fill the stages. People still flock to the theatre particularly when a critical performance (usually a well-made play), which questions the

status quo, is staged. Currently, in Addis Ababa, the state-owned theatres namely (the Biherawi (National), Hager Fikir (Love of the Country), Mazegaja Bet Bahl Adarash (City Hall), Ras Theatre, Hitsanat ena Wetatoch (Children and Youth), Oromo Bahl Mae'kel (Oromo Cultural Center), hotels, private halls and some regional states' cultural spaces are filled with performances. A play may stay in the repertoire continuously for one up to three years. Theatres showcase their productions from Monday through Sunday.

However, aside from the many BA and MA theses and few journal articles, no Ethiopian has published a book on Ethiopian theatre in an academic setting or peer-reviewed space. There have only been two books published that focus on Ethiopian theatre and performance. In 2012, a Russian scholar, G.A. Balashova published *Drama in Modern Ethiopian Literature and Theatre*. Though it can be seen as an addition to other intellectual works that unsettle the prevalent Eurocentric view in Ethiopian theatre scholarship, which posits theatre arts as alien to Ethiopians, Balashova's book is also interested in capturing the “genesis,” “history and evolution of drama” setting forth to “determine” Ethiopia's “national texture of drama” through contextualization (13-17).

Even though Balashova does not even cite Jane Plastow's work (including other intellectual engagements), Plastow, a British scholar, has been engaged in analyzing the Ethiopian theater and performance world for decades. Already in 1996, she published a “comparative” study, *African Theatre and Politics: The Evolution of Theatre in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe*, which despite her generalizations and factual errors, established Ethiopian theatre studies at international level and showed the nexus between

Ethiopian theatre and politics. However, given that these works too follow similar positivist methodology of traditional historiography, the whole epistemic infrastructure of Ethiopian theatre and performance studies needs to be deconstructed for the field to move beyond debates on genesis, historicist narration of evolutions, and modernist discussions.

In that regard, Mohamed Hamid's Ph.D. dissertation (2006), which he completed at North Western University under the supervision of Dwight Conquergood, is important. His work critically looks into the Habesha Identity formation in the Washington D.C. area where the old alliance between Ethiopian immigrants and African Americans morphed into confrontations. Using a Lefebvrian spatial analysis, Mohammed complicates the politics of race, capital, and subjectivity (Mohammed). Unfortunately, Mohammed has not been able to come back to Ethiopia and to its home institution, Department of Theatre Arts. Neither has his dissertation been published yet.

My dissertation will fill the lacuna contributing to the fields of Ethiopian and African theatre and performance studies. Its decolonial performance historiographic lens will challenge not only the boundaries of traditional (positivist) historiography but also poststructural and postcolonial historiographic debates. This decolonial embodied historiography argues that Hegelian and Rankean historiography always already marked the non-European other as temporally and spatially im/mobile where mobility is reduced to linear movement towards the white man's temporal world whereas "the body" of the other (for instance an African body) is ontologically and forever and ever fastened in the "Torrid Zone" (Hegel).

Performance as Concept, Method, and Battlefield

Using critical performance historiography as a mode of thinking and as an object of analysis or a site of struggle, this dissertation focuses on why and how certain bodies move in and outside of the Ethiopian state-owned theatres, particularly on and off stages of the National and Love of the Country theatres. This methodology allows me to go beyond the Eurocentric colonial binary of mind and body and take the often-disavowed embodied historiography, theatre stage, everyday quotidian actions, and performativity, which I understand not just as citations but also as re-citations or discursive-embodied relations in a three-dimensional space-time.

“When I say ‘I do’ [sic] take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife,” J.L. Austin writes about what speech acts do, “I am not reporting on a marriage [but] indulging in it” (6). Austin then calls this ‘indulgence’ in marriage “a performative” to show “the issuing of the utterance [‘I do’] is the performing of an action” (7). Building on and departing from Austin’s idea of performativity, Judith Butler asks: “where and when does such a performative [sic] utterance that puts into effect the relation that it names?” (Critically Queer 17). She rethinks performativity as “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names” (Bodies 2). In Butler’s view, performativity produces materiality of bodies, which she posits as “the effect of power [or] as power’s most productive effect” (Ibid). Butler’s idea of performativity helps us to locate Austin’s “utterance” and the attendant “action” (performing) in webs of power-knowledge or discursive formations.

However, it should be noted that Butler disavows Austin’s “action” while she

extends the performative into the discursive field. In spite of the fact that her idea of performativity allows us to consider performance of power to name and effect a consequence on fixture of bodies (what she calls “materiality”), Butler’s disavowal of embodied action blurs multiple and chaotic movements in a three dimensional space-time. One, her move displaces utterance outside of the scripted and writing/acting bodies. Two, it excises embodied enactment (one source/force) of power as it tends to focus more on the effect. In other words, it exiles embodied social relations in three-dimensional space-time for it conceptualizes materiality as a unidirectional effect of power. Four, this kind of understanding of materiality does not account for tactical insurgencies and reduces performativity to one-dimensional flow of power-knowledge. It limits citationality to only oppressive heteropatriarchal regimes excluding re-citations from discourses of resistance. This, in turn, makes discussion of historical materialism imperative.

Awam Amkpa notes that “The Matter of the Body” also matters since those bodies, which are always already “spoken for,” “do not have the luxury of stepping in and out of the textuality of the body.” In so doing, Amkpa invites us to revisit the ways in which history punctures materiality. In this regard, a question that Athena Athanasiou poses in her conversation with Judith Butler is important: “To what extent is the performative determined by the burden of its sedimented histories?” (*Dispossession* 126). Athanasiou brings the idea of Benjaminian messianism to rethink performativity as an open ended dialectical relation within and against power. In her conversation with Athanasiou, Butler alters her idea of performativity. Rethinking performativity to include

a political enactment, Butler argues that (political) performativity “is supported by extralegal, cultural, political, and discursive conditions, translations from struggles and modes of organizing that are neither state-supported nor state-centered” (101). She theorizes performativity as a fight amid and against precarity or a “corporeal struggle for existence, for persistence” (130). Sedimented history of sexualized and commodified women show us their fights are indeed full of precariousness. Yet, their spatial practices are not just about existence and resilience. Franz Fanon already said, “[T]he real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself” (Black Skin 229). Drawing on Fanon, Sylvia Wynter would call such endless performative a poetic praxis. For her, *being human* or what we can call *becoming human* is premised on unsettling the biocentric reason and science so as to invent a new life form through new poetry and knowledge as Aimé Césaire would have it (Wynter and McKittrick “Unparalleled”).

Building on Dwight Conquergood’s insights, I wish to argue that going beyond the text (without discarding it), critiquing artificial dichotomy between mind and body, and thinking through and with the thinking and moving bodies are the necessary components of decolonial embodied historiography (“Beyond the Text” 59). This mode of thinking is important to my work because it allows me to deconstruct the heteropatriarchal practice of attaching the body, particularly the female body to the “irrational, unruly, and dangerous” “inferior realm of experience” (Ibid). Embedded in my decolonial praxis, this perspective helps me to reveal epistemic as well as embodied violence (“Ethnography” 82). It is vital to consider two caveats that come from two

feminist performance materialist historians. Ayako Kano warns us not to take everything as a performance given that it is not that easy for a gendered body to step in and outside of the social space as a performer. It is not “a custom of costume choice” (3). Rachmi Diyah Larasati reminds us that taking the body as a thinking human being is vital (186-195). Yet, that should not end in fossilizing the female performing body but should take her presence in a performance space very seriously, as Larasati would have it. This concept helps us also to rethink the idea of re-membering a marginalized body in the present moment. However, it needs to be noted that the historical material condition, in which a female performing body moves, animates the ways in which we see and enact presence given that selective remembering and forgetting as well as age, disability and ephemerality of bodies puncture “presence.”

Structure

The structure of the dissertation follows this methodology of performance. Chapter One unsettles an “overrepresented” object, politics of ethnicity by revealing what kind of historiography creates the condition of possibility for its re-emergence in the 1990s. This part theoretically probes the notion of *burden of history* that circulates in Ethiopian historiography as a tautology. The chapter espouses critical unsettling of traditional historiography in view of coloniality of power as articulated by and keeping the tension among Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí (critique of Eurocentric ‘bio-logic’ models ‘gender’ in relation to history’), Aníbal Quijano (raced capitalism), María Lugones (coloniality of gender) and Sylvia Wynter (rethinking of being human as a planetary problem and praxis) (Oyěwùmí; Quijano “Coloniality”; Lugones “Coloniality of

Gender”; Wynter “Unsettling”).

Given that the Ethiopian politics of identity has made ethnicity the only avenue to citizenship, political economy and culture, this section interrogates the issues of gender and sexuality as a function of coloniality of historiography. This part of the dissertation anchors the discussion in a dialectical image of the so-called ‘ethnic-developmental’ dance presented at the 60th anniversary of the Ethiopian National (Federal) theatre. In my analysis of the dialectical image, in which a senior female performer passed a necklace as a baton to a younger female dancer, I ask what is occluded in the transmission of an object/culture as epitomized in an “ethnic-developmental” dance that is choreographed by the state and how does the presence of a female dancing body puncture the neoliberal discourse of diversity and transmission of culture?

This probing necessitates the resingularization of the past. Accordingly, Chapter Two goes beyond the overrepresentation of ethnicity in the present and reveals other articulations of desires, strategies, and tactics of resilience and resistance during the 1974 revolution. Contrary to the mis/representation of the past that establishes the ethnicity question as a binary opposition to the class question in “the Ethiopian Student Movement” of the 1974 Marxist revolution, the chapter argues that multiple movements, ideologies, and articulations of freedom by various segments of the society come to surface defying their present ‘appearance.’

Taking the Ethiopian National theatre stage as a site of struggle, Chapter Two, uncovers the ways in which artists in general and female performers in particular, fought against the Haile Selassie’s ancient regime (1930-1935 and 1941-1974) by forging

alliance with Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, a prolific playwright, thinker, poet, and art administrator. While he was acting as vice minister at the newly established Ministry of Culture and director of the National Theatre (re-christening Haile Selassie I Theatre), Tsegaye staged his idea of ‘Ethiopian socialism’ with a *negritude* predilection as a critique of other leftist Marxian articulations of the 1974 revolution. However, despite his progressive and anti-colonial politics, he failed to respond to the artists’ call for revolutionary change that would alter their inferior position in the society and the theatres. Once Tsegaye became a vice minister of the Ministry of Youth and Culture, he spatialized the National Theatre as progressive sacred inter/national institution, rendering the female performers bodies as abject/impure and extraneous. And to be more precise, this chapter shows the way in which the playwright-thinker-official introduced strategies to discipline and punish the female performers, accusing them of involving in “part-time prostitution” and polluting/stifling the socialist progressive temporality. Attending to the dialectical tension that such strategic action would bear on the tactical counter-moves, the chapter maps the female performers’ dramaturgy of survival and resistance. In order to lay bare what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls “reproductive heteronormativity” or reproductions of multifaceted relations of domination and their infrastructures, I analyze plays staged in and outside of the state-owned theatres as well as the movements of the female performers in the interstices of the inter/national stages, their cabarets, and daily ordinary lives (*Aesthetic*).

Chapter Three discusses how the 1974 revolutionary leftist civilian groups, which grew out of the student movements, the military government and the state-owned theatres

in particular, mis/represent Haile Selassie's rule as a regime that flirted with and tolerated "prostitution." Taking up this issue of mis/over/representation, the chapter probes into genealogy of this mis/over/representation in order to show the moment of emergence of the raced, gendered, sexualized, commodified, and dis/abled female body at the beginning of the twentieth century. Informed by Shaden Tageldin's idea of "translational seduction," or production of consent in the seductive imperial field of power, the chapter shows how the coloniality of power operates in epistemic and embodied relations (*Disarming*). Chapter Three shows how performance participated in inventing such kind of female bodies and how the women artists used performance and other public spaces to engender resistance against Haile Selassie's rule.

In the closing chapter, I argue that, with no serious and constant public intellectual debate on these issues, with the pervasive projects of ethno/nationalism and development that are punctured by the coloniality of history, Eurocentric colonial epistemology will continue to thrive in Ethiopia. Neoliberalism, the formation of the middle-class society as a goal, and the uncritical identity politics will continue to permeate the social, political, and artistic spaces. Languages of the left have been re-appropriated, abused, and tainted to the extent that, today, a left lexicon would frighten Ethiopians. These conditions necessitate the creation of new languages, new visions of the human, new trans-genre poetics-politics, critical theory, and embodied praxis in the everyday life, as the three chapters of this dissertation will try to suggest.

CHAPTER ONE

Decolonial Embodied Historiography:

What Can/Not Be Thought and Practiced?

Introduction

This chapter is my attempt to critique the Ethiopian state choreography of ethnicity on the neoliberal inter/national stages. To accomplish this critique, I will focus on the notion of *the burden of history* that circulates widely in Ethiopian historiography as an “overrepresented” object as Sylvia Wynter would have it (“Unsettling” 257-337). I also draw attention to theoretical debates in Ethiopian historiography, raising the issues of intelligibility, the burden of history, methodology, and coloniality beyond colonialism to critique Ethiopian traditional historiography, exceptionalism, and the attendant epistemic and embodied violence.

This theoretical mapping is followed by my discussion of how Pan-Ethiopianism and ethno-nationalisms have obfuscated realities in the past and in the present as well as shattered the possibilities of challenging the status quo. And to be more precise: I will discuss the 60th anniversary of the Ethiopian National Theatre to investigate how performance can be used both to hide the brutalities of the state and make resistance possible. The chapter zeros in on a Konso-Dirashe (two neighboring ethnic groups) song-dance that was performed at the celebration. Using what Benjamin terms ‘dialectics at a standstill’, I explode the constellations around this song-dance in order to trouble the official narrative of cultural preservation and transmission (Benjamin 463). At the same

time, I focus on the temporal and spatial dimension of the image of senior and young female performers to complicate the issues of transmission of culture, subversive presence, history, and inter/subjectivity.

The so-called national/ethnicity question in Ethiopia has had a prominent place since 1991, even if its emergence harkens back to the 1960s. It has been “overdetermined” as the only way of representing political modernity and citizenship. The Ethiopian constitution states: “All sovereign power resides in Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples” (“Proclamation” 4). Even in this valorization of identity politics, the nation seems to stand higher on the altar of identity politics implying that nationalities and peoples are yet to develop into a nation (Teshale “Modernity” 31-57). The logic seems to be evolutionary.

The demands flowing from various ethnic groups to change their status from district to zonal level; or from being one of many ethnic groups lumped in one state to becoming an autonomous state say a lot about how inadequate and problematic the conception of “nations, nationalities, and peoples” is. If people had experienced a genuine federalism that benefited all equally, one would have considered it a success since Ethiopia has more than eighty ethnic groups historically marginalized in various ways. The phrase ‘more than eighty ethnic groups’ makes one wonder how many societies or groups are buried in the misty and mystic shadow of the everyday language that is normalized to such a degree that no one asks about societies or groups, which have been rendered unknown or invisible. The elites of certain ethnic groups, particularly those from Tigryan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and their collaborators, have ab/used the

question of ethnicity itself when they disenfranchised various members of other ethnic groups in the name of ethnic liberation.

I am here not to recuperate ethno/nationalism, however. I am interested in exploring the following questions: How has the ethnicity or the so-called national question become the main way of knowing Ethiopia's experience and addressing the multifaceted interlocked epistemic and embodied problems in Ethiopia? What other ways of knowing, histories of resistances, and desires of freedom have been repressed and made unthinkable?

The Question of Intelligibility: History, Time, Place, and Space

Before I address the above questions, let me begin by saying that the ways in which an event has been or is understood are equal to knowing how the object is valorized as real/visible. Intelligibility cannot be understood separately from history's relentless endeavor to narrate what *has happened* as one universally constructed *reality* as Ronald Barthes has it. Nietzsche argues that "there are no facts as such" but "[w]e must always begin by introducing a meaning in order for there to be a fact" (qtd. in Barthes). Following Nietzsche, Barthes argues that objective history constructs a *prestige* around the notion of history as the representation of *what happened* out there and then – the *Real* which is "never anything but an unformulated signified, sheltered behind the apparent omnipotence of the referent" (139). He calls this the "reality effect" on which history has based its life.

Building on this insight, Michel de Certeau argues that "the real is the connotation of *what can be thought*" (Certeau *Writing of History* 55). This does not, however, mean

that an event or life is fiction. His argument is that: “[W]e cannot conclude that the reference to the real is obliterated. This reference has instead been somewhat displaced. It is no longer immediately given by narrated or “reconstituted” objects” (43). The process of making something intelligible simultaneously conceals something else. When history constructs “models” to *make* an object it does not just make something *thinkable* but renders the *other* unthinkable. Intelligibility is made through symbolic *topos*. It is mazelike. It is political. This is a form of displacement *par excellence*.

In the course of this chapter, I pose epistemological questions that take into account embodied experiences in order to expose Rankean and Hegelian methods and the tenacity of Enlightenment rationalization that continues to inform the reasoning of Ethiopian historiography, which sustains the status quo and/or constructs an unethical articulation of freedom in the neoliberal present. Once such an important intervention happens, Michal Kobiałka avers, the roles a critical historian plays could include accentuating how “singular events or fragments are brought to one’s attention,” “what tensions are revealed by disclosing the situatedness of the object and the subject in the time of the now,” and “how these events or fragments participate in the practices of institutions and in civic life” (“Theatre” 35-36).

The object ontologically finds itself not just in a state of flux but in a constant open dialectical temporal and spatial field. A materialist historiographer, Walter Benjamin would say, needs to employ a dialectical mode of thinking in order to think with the past. He writes:

No statement is more suited to evoke that state of unrest which constitutes the beginning of any contemplation of history that has the right to call itself dialectical. This state of unrest refers to the demand on the researcher to abandon the tranquil contemplative attitude toward the object in order to become conscious of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past finds itself in precisely this present.

(“Eduard Fuchs” 227)

Hence, to take the present moment seriously would mean to catch the dialectical image that circulates in the space of the now (*Jetztzeit*). This kind of history is not “epic” but “epoch[al].” This is why Benjamin can argue that: “[h]istoricism presents the eternal image *of* the past; historical materialism presents a given experience *with* the past, an experience which stands unique” (Ibid, my emphasis). Since historical representations of the past make extensive use of the “reality effect” with a valorized desire to capture *what has “truly” happened*, they tend to interpret meanings rather than attending to relations whose ground is always already precarious.

Thus, it is important to ‘consciously’ examine how certain “fragment of the past finds itself in precisely this moment” and how a certain intelligible object is forged as such by engaging with a singular moment of its emergence. A historical materialist project engages *with* the past. Benjamin calls this act “the consolidation of *experience* with history” and it is “directed towards a *consciousness* of the present which explodes the continuum of history” (Ibid, my emphasis).¹

¹ I have emphasized these two terms in order to relate them with Franz Fanon’s and Sylvia Wynter’s conception of historical sensibilities.

“Why, in effect, is there the imperative of experience, or the necessity of consciousness?” Sylvia Wynter poses this important question as she develops what she calls “the sociogenic principle” by drawing and building on Fanon’s problematization of “consciousness” in relation to biological “phylogeny and ontogeny” (“Sociogenic Principle” 30-66).² Cognizant of Fanon’s “consciousness of the body,” Wynter argues that her “sociogenic principle [is] culturally programmed rather than genetically articulated” subjectivity (59). Yet, the “natural-science approach to the phenomena of consciousness” inconsistently hinges on “our present culture’s purely biocentric and adaptive conception” of the human (Ibid). Based on this critique, Wynter expands the question of historiography to embrace historically and materially situated consciousness and the body or “consciousness of the body” which realizes itself in a “real dialectic between” the body and the “spatio-temporal world” as Fanon has it (110-111). More important she makes her intellectual quest an epistemological question by pointing out that the category called Man is discursively invented.

History as an Epistemic and Embodied Problematic

Foreign or local, conventional historiographers have been writing that Ethiopia has severely suffered from ‘*the burden of history*.’ Suffice it to mention three of them here for I will deal with this notion more closely under the sub-section, “the burden of *burden of history*.” In 2002, Alessandro Triulzi used the phrase “burden of history” in his critique of the existing competing nationalisms in Ethiopia (280). Paradoxically enough,

² See also Fanon *Black Skin White Masks* 4 & 83-85. I am in a way answering to Demetrius L. Eudell's tacit call for engaging Fanon and Wynter to have a productive historiographic conversation. After he critiques traditional history, Eudell gestures towards the study of consciousness as articulated by Fanon and Wynter (Eudell 1-24).

in 1994, Adhana Haile Adhana, a professional historian-cum-politician, argued for (primordial) identity politics conjuring up the “burden” of a “past [history]” that measured alienation from ancient Abyssinian pedigree in terms of a usurpation and control of power by “Shawa dynasty” that shifted authority from the Amhara-Tigray-Agaw tripartite imperial rule (12-29). Adhana borrowed the term from Czeslaw Jesman who represented Ethiopia in 1963 as an anomaly that was “in Africa but not of Africa” because it was encumbered by a “historical burden” which, in his view, hindered the country from being contemporary with the “modern world” (10).

In traditional historiography, I argue, history has been thought of as a thing of the past (as an event that already happened) being measured in terms of accumulated (empty) time. This elides the fact that history (as a discipline and profession) has been burdened by Eurocentric/colonial theory and methodology. Aside from the Eurocentrism rooted in Ethiopian academia since its inception, critical thinking and public intellectual practices have been banished particularly since the coming to power of the military junta. The bold measure that the incumbent coalition party Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF; rather, TPLF-EPRDF, given that TPLF has been the core party that formed the coalition in its image) took against senior professors when it sacked forty-two of them in 1993, the consequent attack on academic freedom, the political assignment of university administrators, and the military intervention in any dissent at the universities are some of the reasons why critical thinking is severely curtailed at the University. Eurocentrism, however, thrived. “Our training” continues to “shape our categories,” thereby, our life forms, as Anthony Bogues articulates it when he thinks about “epistemic

decolonization” in the African university (206-21). Though there have been various attempts, Ethiopia is yet to build a critical epistemic infrastructure that deconstructs as it builds a space for re-creation of multiple options.

It was the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in England and the University of Wisconsin-Madison that took the lead to erect African History as a field of study. Roland Oliver and Jan Vansina were the foremost figures that spearheaded the project.³ Though it is important to take note of the fact that Africans demanded to ‘start’ the study of their history as Vansina states, the process of establishing the discipline cannot be understood separately from colonial history, the founding of the African University, and the University in the West (*Living with Africa* 50). Mahmood Mamdani tells us that the modern African University was born out of the tension between “a universalism based on a singular notion of the human” and the “nationalist responses to it” (“Public Intellectual” 68-71). Despite the sporadic emergent critical engagements, Universal and Eurocentric historiographical procedures continue to be dominant in Ethiopia. Given that this dominance produces epistemic and embodied violence, I am interested in the ways in which historians and performing artists have been fighting this historiographic violence in the theatre of history as well as on and off inter/national theatre stages.

For instance, the history of autochthony or nativism (story of ‘we came first’) that has been deployed by uncritical Pan-Ethiopianists (those who argue for Greater Ethiopia based on ‘three-thousand years of untrammelled history’) and ethno-nationalist scholars

³ For their autobiography, in which both outlined their personal as well as their academic journey, see Oliver; Vansina *Living with Africa* especially chapter 3.

(those who question the former while they essentialize ethnic identity) reify one another's logic and method. Out of a *genuine intention*, some are calling for a moral intervention in order to lessen the frightening tension between ethnic groups or what they perceive as a *burden of history* (276-288). I want to ask, however, what kind of 'moral economy' would ameliorate these multifaceted performative discourses/actions that result *from* and *in* a doubly Eurocentric (in doing and undoing) epistemic engagement? An answer to that question necessitates a close examination of both history writing and what has been traditionally considered historiography, i.e., the writing of the writing of history, as well as of an assumption embedded in it suggesting that *historiography* is different from *history*.

Many 'professional historians' see the *burden* in Ethiopian historiography less as an inherently problematic issue embedded in *history* - a raced, gendered, sexed, classed, and imperial (historical) discipline. Rather, they view history as sheer temporality (Agamben 97-116; D. Scott 5-14). I argue that these writers measure only the *burden* of the past (time/history) on the present rather than rethinking the conventional philosophy of *history* as an epistemic and embodied *burden*. Put differently, they posit history in terms of an abstraction of reality, as just a change in time rather than understanding it as an embodied/material dis/placement or as question of spatiality, real bodily injuries, and subjectivity.

At stake here is rethinking historiography as a mode of thinking and as an embodied action that must account for the burden history places on spaces and bodies as well as time itself. If such a proposition is tangible, I can respond to F.R. Ankersmit's call

to “*think* about the past rather than *investigate* it” by paying attention to “meaning” rather “than reconstruction and genesis” (152).

More important, I query the conditions that inform the formation of today’s identity politics, concealment of neoliberal structuring, and production of gendered and sexed subjectivities that hinge on mis/representation of the past in the present. Though my view is not “presentist” in a sense that the past is abundant to be exploited by the present manipulation, I would say, following James Baldwin, that history is about the *present* as much as it is *present* in our bodies. Baldwin allows me to see history as an embodied experience that “we carry [...] within us” in the present and as “our frames of reference, our identities, and aspirations” (106). Yet, Baldwin does not see history as eternally endowed with “tyrannical power” but as an idea and lived experience that can change through “recreat[ing] oneself according to a principle more humane and liberating” (Ibid).

The historicity of History as a *modern* theory and the spatial re/organization it has created, despite its disavowal of *apriority*, makes the epistemic and embodied “decolonial option” in Ethiopian historiography urgent and relevant. Kobiakka reminds us that the Rankean idea that “every stage of history must be judged as an end in itself” and the Hegelian notion of “progressive movement on the world-historical stage” continue to “bracke[t] the ways of doing Western academic historiography.” What comes to mind are the works of Enrique Dussel, Aníbal Quijano, and Walter Mignolo, who question both Eurocentrism and the critique of Eurocentric epistemes. Thinking with and against Andre Gunder Frank, Dussel argues for what he terms a “trans”-modernity that challenges the

assumption that Europe has been the quintessence of modernity, the alpha and omega of humanity. According to Dussel, non-Western cultures “have developed together with [European modernity and] have survived until the present with enough human potential to give birth to a cultural plurality that will emerge after modernity and capitalism” (234). Dussel rejects the assumption that Europe has been the beginning, the center, and the destiny. Indeed, Eurocentric knowledge universalizes everything, disregarding the plurality of multiple entrances and exits, of emergence and hope. It even denies and superimposes itself on its own plurality. In this regard, Timothy Brennan’s ‘re-discovery’ of Vico’s *The New Science* or “a new critical art” is instructive since it shows how a European thinker questioned Cartesian rationalism and argued that what we can be certain about is the world that we have invented (*Borrowed Light* 119-120). Brennan sees in Vico’s thinking “early instruments for a de-centering of European culture and a respect for foreign peoples” with “anticolonial thought” that debunks the mainstream view that Europe is the cradle of “civilization,” “government, technology, and culture,” more important, in his “condemnation of conquest” (24-25).

Yes, we can say, following Vico, “By its nature, the human mind is indeterminate; hence when man is sunk in ignorance, he makes himself the measure of the universe”(75). Yet, while we recuperate such visions of freedom, how would we account for the onslaught that modernity has unleashed and for the Other’s or for the “human potential to give birth to a cultural plurality?” Neither inattentive to a heterogeneity of cultures nor a denier of future hopes, Aníbal Quijano shows the precarious situation in which we find ourselves today and asserts that the “imaginary in

the non-European cultures could hardly exist today and, above all, reproduce itself outside of these relations” (“Coloniality” 23). Mignolo proposes the idea of decolonial thinking. For him, this episteme is interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary, trans-modern, and works towards engendering freedom through a radical critique of coloniality of power as and in the praxis of living (Mignolo and Walsh 99-102).

As Kobialka notes it well, the Hegelian idea of history continues to live with us albeit with new rationalizations (“Performance Historiography” 225-258). Likewise, Emmanuel Chukwanda Eze pushes back the assumption that “much has been gained by moving from the position that Africa had no history to the position that [its] history exist[s]” (176). Eze insists on posing “questions about unresolved conceptual themes not only in the idea of cultures, tradition, historical progress and modernity but also about history writing as such” (Ibid). While we know the fact that colonial history relegated the non-Western to the realm of the sub-human, of the animal, and of thing-ness, women are “even more deeply in the shadow” because “the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant” even when historians acknowledge female marginalization and insurgency (*Critique* 274). I would say that a critique of traditional historiography and the critical way of thinking *with* the past cannot be productive without understanding the coloniality of power, thereby, coloniality of historiography.

Coloniality of Historiography

The continuous imperialist epistemology and colonial/modern projects influenced the ways in which feminisms study subjectivities, understand and write about the past. A number of feminist thinkers and activists, however, have interrogated history and

historiography as they shape history as a discipline/profession and as embodied subjectivity. Gayatri Spivak would say build the infrastructure first, question inequalities without claiming sameness (*Aesthetic Education* 429-442). History being a masculinist project in its theoretical formation and practical procedures, the relation between African feminisms and historiography still demands much unraveling. This is mainly due to a traditional historiographic engagement that is mostly interested in reviewing or writing about the writings of history rather than overturning the primacy of such writings or of the assumptions embedded in history itself. This trajectory begs the question of progressive history in that it wants to catch up with the West. Given that traditional historiography limits itself to writing about the writings of history, its tautology is a sign of the reproduction of the epistemic and embodied violence unleashed by the Eurocentered coloniality of power, which according to Aníbal Quijano “has proved to be longer than Eurocentered colonialism” (27). Yet such critical concepts themselves await a feminist critique. Hence, in this chapter, thinkers like Oyèrónké Oyě̀wùmí, María Lugones, and Sylvia Wynter inform my main theoretical explorations. Since she reminds us not to be caged in any identity politics, I follow Sylvia Wynter as I explore the tension between her ideas and those of other thinkers like Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo.

Writing women into history, en-gendering history and centering sexuality have been the major tropes of African feminist historiography albeit with a few exceptions that point to unsettling the conception of gender, sexuality, and history writing. Bolane Awe writes that the “masculine-centered view of history” naturalized men and their lived experience, making African women ‘anomalies’” (211). Awe attacks one significant tenet

of Eurocentric history writing, though she does not sustain or complicate this epistemological question. Instead, she proposes “writing women into history” as the way forward.

Speaking to writers like Awe, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza calls for engendering African women’s history. He critiques “the inadequate representation of women in African history,” examines the three “dominant paradigms” (nationalist school; dependency perspective; Marxist approach), and shows how feminist historians reconstructed African women’s history (207-232). Coining the term “malestream” to critique the androcentric mainstream African historiography, Zeleza underscores the need to move from political history to social history. Indeed, Zeleza cites African feminist scholars like Aisha Imam and Amina Mama and critiques the Eurocentric thinking and the attendant binaries embedded in Enlightenment thought, which manifest themselves “not only in women’s studies but also the social science disciplines and the humanities” (219). However, he does not interrogate historiography following his critique of Eurocentrism and developing a methodology that would help us shed light on what he calls “women’s history.” Hence, Zeleza advises African feminist historians to go beyond “restoring women to history” and usher in “writing gender history.”⁴ He neither questions the methodologies of history as a discipline/profession nor rethinks the conception of gender.

Building on the new trajectory set by writers like Marc Epprecht who “theoriz[ed] sexuality beyond gender,” Nakanyike Musisi critiqued the project of en-gendering history for not taking sexuality as one main venture of analysis (1-7). Acknowledging the fact

⁴ Other writers have also taken similar notes. For instance, Nancy Rose Hunt writes that “Rather than placing African women in history, there is a need to ‘en-gender’ African history.” See Hunt 373.

that the last quarter of a century (since the 1990s) “witnessed the production of nuanced and complex studies that reveal the interplay of sexuality and gender,” Musisi calls for “a sexuality-centered African history” (315). In the quest for critical intersectionality and transdisciplinarity or in Wynter’s terms trans-genre engagement, a number of African feminists have continued to challenge the status quo established by Man both in theory and in praxis.

In the deconstruction of Man as a universal subject, as writers like Bibi Bakare-Yusuf notes it, feminist writers have shown how African conceptions of gender, unlike the Eurocentric bio-logical model, are not static but dynamic and manifold.⁵ However, insofar as the issue of African historiography and the category of gender and sexuality are concerned, with all the inadequacies, paradoxes, and slippages involved in her theory, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí is instructive. “Of all the things that were produced in Africa during the colonial period - cash crops, states, and tribes, to name a few,” argues Oyěwùmí, “history and tradition are the least acknowledged” (80). Setting forth to directly unsettle history writing as a Eurocentric project, Oyěwùmí begins with a different epistemological sensibility. Distancing herself from the universal notion of history (as) writing, she differentiates history as a lived experience, as lived oral tradition, and as a written narrative in a discipline and profession, which was founded in Europe. However, Oyěwùmí does not lose sight of “ideological interests” rooted in the recording of oral traditions provided that archiving was part of the “European assault” (Ibid).

Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí opens the possibility to trouble the invention of ‘women’ as a

⁵ See Iris Berger 130-154; Bakere-Yusuf 121-142; Okome 1-14; Nzegwu 73-95; Moore; Herbert; Epstein and Straub; Amadiume. As it speaks well to my conception of coloniality of power, I want to add to the list: Wynter “Beyond the Word of Man” 637-648.

universal category and the attendant “gendering” and “patriarchization” by looking at the epistemological imposition on Oyo-Yoruba (an aspect of Nigerian) institutions. Even though my aim is different from Oyěwùmí’s in that I am not interested in affirming an ‘authentic’ African epistemology, I found her project useful as she questions the Eurocentric episteme, which animates the idea of women’s, gender and sexuality history in Africa. She says: “the concept of gender bias in history itself calls for a close examination in that it privileges the Euro-American [Westocentric] tradition of male-dominant history” (83).

Oyěwùmí’s call is crucial for three reasons: First, her geneological probing into pre-colonial epistemes helps us to reveal the violence that European single Truth commits against non-Western knowledge systems and life forms. (In view of the Ethiopian particular experience, I would like to include here those knowledge systems that were not obliterated by political colonization due to people’s struggles and the ones that survived the colonial/modern in terms of coloniality of power). Second, her approach recognizes that since European rule by the end of the nineteenth century impacted many African countries, European colonialism itself violently reshaped both African bodies and African social categories. (In view of Ethiopian experiences and the scholarship around them, I would say that Ethiopian studies have not given due attention to issues of race, gender, and sexuality in relation to the colonial assaults made against Ethiopians. For the narrative is preoccupied with linear untrammelled history focusing more on the victories at the expense of the atrocities and their continued duress on subjectivities). 3) Third, the Eurocentric knowledge system or what Oyěwùmí calls “Westocentric” episteme

continues its dominance in the production of knowledge (This too is an important opening to consider coloniality of power seriously and unravel Eurocentric scholarship that assumes that it is immune to any kind of coloniality for Ethiopia was able to defeat white physical colonial power on many battlefields).

Hence, as it is argued by María Lugones, Oyěwùmí helps us to rethink the idea of coloniality of power as developed by Aníbal Quijano. Lugones first delineates how Quijano conceptualizes the nexus between “race” and “gender” in light of “Eurocentered capitalist power.” In Quijano’s thinking, the struggle over “the four basic areas of human existence: sex, labor, collective authority and subjectivity/intersubjectivity, their resources and products” inform the ways in which power gets organized in “relations of domination” (Quijano 22-32; Lugones “Coloniality of Gender” 369-390; “Heterosexualism” 186-209). In this conception, what structures the category of sex/gender and the attendant fight to govern “sexual access, its resources, and products” is to be known as “organized around the axes of coloniality and modernity” (qtd. in Lugones 370). María Lugones then argues that this understanding is “too narrow” to fully reveal “the oppressive modern/colonial constructions of the scope of gender” (Ibid). Coupled with his “patriarchal and heterosexual understanding” of the conflicts, Lugones holds, Quijano takes for granted “the global, Eurocentered, capitalist understanding of what gender is about” (Ibid). In Lugones’s view, therefore, Quijano’s conception of gender and race masks the workings of power that oppressed and disenfranchised non-Western “colonized women.”

Following Oyěwùmí’s use of terms like “anatomic sex,” “anatomic female,” and

“anatomic male” (which can be read as anasex, anafemale, and anamale) and the pre-colonial un-gendered (meaning unlike the conception of gender that we know in the west) institutions of Oyo-Yoruba people, Lugones shows the degree of “inferiorization” that colonialism perpetrated in the fields such as economy and politics, including the “inferiorization” of anafemales (380).

However, to say that Oyěwùmí’s conception of “gender, the colonial, Eurocentered, capitalist construction” is “much more encompassing than Quijano’s” would not be just an exaggeration. It would also uncritically deploy Oyěwùmí’s essentialist Afrocentric assumptions. Here mention needs to be made that Quijano’s conception of “intersubjectivity” and “seduction” of power helps us to take seriously the ubiquity of colonial modernity and the dialectical relations thereof (23). As it is very slippery to take Quijano for granted without consulting Lugones, it would be very perilous to deploy Oyěwùmí’s theory of coloniality as “much more encompassing” minus the critiques offered to her work, *The Invention of Women*.

In this regard, Bibi Bakere-Yusuf’s critical reflections on Oyěwùmí’s *The Invention of Women* are very instructive. First, Bakere-Yusuf acknowledges three critical engagements that Oyěwùmí makes — that is, unsettling Eurocentric “bio-logic” determinism; questioning “gender structuration as a primary organizing principle in social relations”; and calling attention to “categories and concepts that are important to a culture” (122).

Bakere-Yusuf then gives an extensive critique of Oyěwùmí’s work focusing on three major areas. First, she aims at debunking the methodological flow that relies on

ahistorical etymological explanation by pointing out the textuality of language. In other words, in Bakere-Yusuf's view, Oyěwùmí "fails to understand the nature of power and the ways in which language is inscribed within social practices" (Ibid). Bakere-Yusuf critiques Oyěwùmí's overreliance on an ahistorical conception arguing that it does not account for "social practices" and it elides the "effects of embodied subjectivity on men and women" (Ibid). Second, Bakere-Yusuf calls out Oyěwùmí's "antipathy and suspicion towards externally derived concepts in favor of hermetically sealed cultural knowledge" and says it is "unnecessary and unfounded" (Ibid). I would also say that this parochialism disavows global intersubjectivity and dialectical tensions that force multiple epistemic and embodied life forms to fight from within, as they cannot step outside of colonial/modern global relations. Third, Bakere-Yusuf presents her critique creatively in a form of suggestion by showing how the existence of "polytheistic and polyrhythmic structure" in "many African cultures" lends a pluralist methodology that allows for the building of a "framework which courts and positively invites alterity, in order to transform it" (Ibid). Through such a lens that accounts for contrapuntal and conflictual beings, I want to focus on the condition of the politics of becoming (inter/subjectivity) through particular engagement with the concept and practice of historiography.

Although Oyěwùmí's critique of Western history writing (as instituted as a discipline and profession) is based on her critical understanding of the historicity of any scholar/ship, the way in which she establishes African epistemology and lived experience (particularly the Oyo-Yoruba culture and social reality) is ahistorical in that it homogenizes time and space. In her attempt to invent an African lived experience as a

complete Otherness in contradistinction to Europe, Oyěwù mí not only denies the longstanding fragmentary global relations particularly those of modernity but also falls prey to identity politics. While she shows the heterogeneity of gender and sexuality, she slips into homogenization of an African episteme, as Africa is a historical construct due to force relations from within and without.

Hence, ahistorical theorization could permeate problematization of coloniality of power unless such theorization is carefully considered. I am offering a tweak to María Lugones' unfiltered borrowing of Oyěwù mí's account of Oyo-Yoruba culture. Provided that an unmediated past is a sheer construction, Lugones would import an empty time-space into the discussion of coloniality of power when she redeploys the Oyěwù mian idea that "gender differentials were introduced where there were none" ("Coloniality of Gender" 377). Critiquing Oyěwù mí on her flawed methodology ("formal linguistic analysis"), Bibi-Bakere Yusuf shows how "gender inequality may still exist [in Yoruba society] by other means despite its absence within language" (140). Hence, Lugones's importation of Oyěwù mí's position would, in turn, stifle the ways in which Lugones critiques Quijano on the basis of the fact that gender is a construction the same way as a race is. Yes, it is important to draw on Oyěwù mí to critique uncritical deployment and projection of Western categories on a non-Western culture and the attendant multiple inferiorizations. However, a critical look at the projection of empty time-space onto coloniality of power is equally vital. The critique of Quijano needs to be based on the inadequacy of his deconstruction of Eurocentric raced colonial modernity as Lugones does it excellently, rather than simply on the denial of hierarchy/asymmetry in the

precolonial time-space.

At this juncture Sylvia Wynter's problematization of the historically invented, or to precisely deploy her term, the "overrepresented[d]" "Man," becomes imperative. The conflation of 'Man' with the human gestures toward trans-genre-humanity that calls into question any universalizing tendency, be it race, class, gender, and/or sexuality. In fact, I would like to keep the tension between María Lugones's critique of Quijano that shows how the Eurocentric binary division of gender and heteropatriarchy pervades his thinking and Sylvia Wynter's insistence that we constantly trouble identity politics of any sort in the conception of coloniality of power.

Of course, like Quijano, Wynter writes that "race unlike gender" is "a purely invented construct" ("Unsettling" 264). However, Lugones unravels a theorization of the coloniality of power that does not take gender as a construct. Lugones's critique seems threefold. She critiques Quijano for uncritically reinscribing the Eurocentric binary divisions of gender and sexuality. She also shows how gender and sexuality are invented constructs just as race is. Without losing sight of Quijano's conception of race and gender as interlaced variables and complicating Crenshaw's conception of intersectionality, she articulates the colonial/modern gender system that accounts for the "intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality" (Lugones *Coloniality of Gender* 369; Crenshaw 139-167). She situates the interrelation within the imperialist invention of the modern/colonial global order by gesturing towards a decolonial move.

As it is important to take into account Lugones's conception of the colonial/modern gender system, Sylvia Wynter's widening and deepening of the

intermeshed relations through incessant questioning of any “overrepresentation” is also useful. Furthering Quijano’s conception of coloniality of power through an articulation of being, Wynter questions “overrepresentation” of the “ethnaclass” called Man in the present to rethink humanity as a planetary trans-genre. She writes:

The correlated hypothesis here is that all our present struggle with respect to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, struggles over the environment, global warming, severe climate change – the sharply unequal distribution of the earth resources [...] – these are all varying facets of the central ethnaclass Man vs. Human struggle. (260-261)

As it is evident in her discussion of Edouard Glissant’s idea of “blockade,” which runs counter to “rhizome,” denoting the nexus between imposed containment and multiple fractured incomplete histories, Wynter is well aware of the fact that “history” “at present [is] ‘relegated’ to an ‘obscure’ representation [which] must now be recovered” (“Beyond” 639). Hence, for Wynter, “the ongoing destruction of our planetary environment,” including “the reality of large-scale poverty and of the population explosion” in ghettoized spaces of the globe, “continues to regulate our behaviors” based on the “present absolute model of nature, Man” (645). Hence, debunking the coloniality of power is a critical act of historiography. Wynter writes this to challenge any “biocentric conception of identity”:

There our “error of reason” with respect to the premise of an absolute “human nature,” as one based on our belief in a relation of pure continuity between the genetically regulated modes of organic

life and the always rhetorico-discursively regulated modes of the human life, still represents our present model of the human, Man, as being as absolute as Newtonian space and time before Einstein.
(Ibid)

Wynter proposes a mode of thinking grounded in an Einsteinian spatial revolution that will allow us to debunk the overrepresentation of Man and any kind of identity politics.

Un-colonized but Colonized⁶: Ethiopian Exceptionalism Narratives

Notwithstanding the particular historical experiences Ethiopians embodied and in spite of the fact that Ethiopian exceptionalism is a multipronged narrative that has informed actions in social relations, it is time to ask: what other realities have been glossed over and what other questions we are not asking due to the metanarrative of *birqiyewa* (the Unique) Ethiopia? In particular, I want to pose this query: How does Ethiopian historiography account for its general neglect of the discussion of the theoretical and methodological issues embedded in history writing while the current political predicament and discourse of ethno/nationalism has been highly affected by the Hegelian and Rankean models of colonial/modern rationality, progress, and science?

When we deal with history as a discipline and profession, we come to know that it was Hegel who first exceptionalized Ethiopia as he placed its culture/civilization in between and betwixt Euro-Asian and African beings wherein he assigned maturity of Spirit through universalization of the white Man (Hegel 220). Coupled with the

⁶ I used this term first in a paper titled, Un-colonized but Colonized: Epistemological Location of Ethiopian Theatre. I presented the paper at two conferences. Ethiopian Writers' Association and Addis Ababa University. *International Conference of African Writers, From the Independence of the Continent to the Liberation of the Mind: The Unfinished Journey*, (Addis Ababa, 2011); BIARI at Brown University. *Critical Global Humanities: Life Forms, Languages, and Sounds of the New*, (Providence, 2011).

thirteenth-century local discourse of Queen of Sheba and King Solomon (whose coupling ‘gave birth’ to the first king of Ethiopia, Menelik I, as the myth has it) that was deployed to legitimate an emerging Solomonic Dynasty, the raced Eurocentric narrative informed the whole scholarship around the Semitic thesis. In this discourse, Ethiopia/Abyssinia is painted as an ancient polity whose racial and civilizational ancestry would be traced back to South Arabia.⁷ Another source of Ethiopian exceptionalism is that polity’s multiple victories over European and other imperialist aggressors.⁸ Given that most postcolonial discussions usually rest on the colonizer/colonized binary, even when they critique such a dichotomy, they tend to take the annihilation of political independence for granted. Despite the continued struggles against colonialism before, during, and after political colonization, Ethiopia’s victory over white power was an inspiration and was held in defiance of the white man’s desire for the total control over black bodies. The worldwide uprising across Africa and the black diaspora when Italy invaded Ethiopia for the second time had a manifold aim. One, it was a resistance against the obliteration of other Africans’ and the black diaspora’s symbols of freedom in the past.⁹ Two, Ethiopia was considered as the black diaspora’s imaginary “country,” one

⁷ These are cases in point with respect to Semiticist scholarship: Consti-Rossini qtd in Toggia “History Writing” 5-29; Anfray “Civilization of Aksum” 362-380; Ludolf *New History of Ethiopia* 1; Tadesse; Budge. For a critique of Semiticist scholarship see Fikru *Bond without Blood* 17-20; Teshale “Anomaly” 414-430; Ayele. (Teshale, Fikru, Toggia and others critique Semiticist scholarship but do not question historicist and positivist theoretical and methodological imports embedded in history. Toggia brings a Foucauldian idea of formation of the object to discuss fictionalization of the past. However, he limits his critique to Semiticist historiography.)

⁸ Here we have dozens of writings that range from ‘public history’ to ‘professional history.’ To mention but two writers who are considered as public historians in Ethiopia: Tekle Tsadiq; Lapiso G. Dilebo. Works written by ‘professional’ historians include Bahru *Zewde Ye’Ethiopia Tarik* especially Chapter 2,3, and 4; Abdussamad and Pankhurst; Paulos and Getachew; Jonas; Minala; Rubenson; Levine; Prouty.

⁹ For the discourse on Ethiopia’s independence and its resonance with Pan-African and black diaspora political struggles, see Davis M.; E. Harris; R. Scott; Asante; Chukumba; B. Harris; Ford and Gannes; James.

that also symbolized home and hope, “inventing bond without blood,” as Fikru Gebre Kidan argues. Third, the rest of Africans and the black diaspora were fighting colonialism and white supremacist capitalist orders while galvanizing support for Ethiopians. Being the only country that has its own script, calendar, and older fossils (2.35-3.2 million years), Ethiopia also prides herself as the seat of civilization and “origin” of humankind. Equally important are its narratives of exceptionalism and “independence” from capitalist powers. These discourses have been deployed in order to resist the images produced or overrepresented by the western media which depicts Ethiopia as destroyed by famine and backwardness.

While it attends to these kinds of complexities, my critique of Ethiopian exceptionalism draws attention to other realities masked by this metanarrative. For example, even though the exceptionalism narrative has camouflaged the critical debates around postcoloniality, it was almost one hundred years ago that Ethiopian critical thinkers such as Gebre-Hiwot Baykedagn who introduced what Tenkir Bongor calls a “prefiguring political economy” in relation to dependency theory. In the words of another Ethiopian economist, Alemayehu Geda, “Gebre Hiwot’s Model” – which came out in the early 1920s - anticipated the “structural economics” theory that Latin Americans created in the late 1940s (“Introduction II” xvii). For Gebre-Hiwot, Ethiopia’s major problems were two-pronged. The first is the internal tribal/ethnic strife that ravaged the peasantry, leaving the state weaker. The second pertains to the international trade imbalance that occurs between an economically advanced Europe that sells manufactured goods (with knowledge and skills invested in them) and an Ethiopia that could only sell raw materials

because its people lack technological and knowledge infrastructure (Gebre-Hiwot 28-186).

Even though it seems that Gebre-Hiwot valorized “Europe’s mind” and insisted that Ethiopians should have that knowledge/mind, his ultimate purpose was to warn his compatriots against colonialism/coloniality. Because he studied in Europe in the late nineteenth century and lived in Sudan in exile from 1905-1912, Gebre-Hiwot knew what the European Man’s raced project was and what “knowledge and technology” did for the British colonialist as it did to the Sudanese. He knew that colonial modernity was covetous. He wrote:

The power of mind of the people that have colonized the countries around us is moving forward defeating every obstacle. For it feels so triumphant [stretches itself all over the world]. Their mind cannot be tackled other than using one’s mind. Hence, woe unto the people who sit idly in ignorance. For they would ultimately capitulate. (102)¹⁰

It is very interesting to note that Gebre-Hiwot explained and analyzed Europe’s mind/knowledge in terms of time-space (forward moving to conquer the world). While he advocated for learning Europe’s technological modernization, Gebre-Hiwot cautioned his fellow Ethiopians to educate their children more broadly arguing that the physical infrastructure would otherwise benefit the *ferenj* (white man). While underlining the importance of development in physical infrastructure, Gebre Hiwot was at once highlighting the significance of knowledge infrastructure.

¹⁰ A literal translation of the terms “it feels triumphant” would be, “[the European mind] is stretching itself on the earth yet it feels it lacks legroom.”

Gebre-Hiwot also suggested that Ethiopia would imitate Japan, as his contemporaries, Hiruy Wolde Selassie and Tekle-Hawariat Tekle-Mariam, did. (Hiruy and Tekle-Hawariyat were also using performances as a method of negotiating European modernity. Given various names like Progressive Intellectuals, Young Ethiopians, and Japanizer by foreigners who drew similarities between them and the Young Turks and members of the Young Egypt movement, two of the reasons why these intellectuals made a roundabout journey to take Japan as a model were the following: One was to see how Japan took knowledge from Europe without succumbing to its direct domination. Second, comparing the economic status of the two countries and evaluating the ways in which Japan developed itself, those intellectuals saw a possibility that a country could grow fast starting from a humble origin.¹¹ As much as Europe seemed alluring, for these intellectuals, it could not be approached without cautious negotiation. Japan offered that caveat whether the move was successful or not.

Cognizant of these conditions, Gebre-Hiwot asked this important question: “Can we say that we Ethiopians have independence [despite our victory over colonialism]?” (102). His answer was negative. In his view, there is no independence without self-sufficiency. Given that he asked such a question in the wake of the Adwa victory over colonialist Italy in 1896, I would say that Gebre-Hiwot had already tried to understand Ethiopian experiences not only based on his concern about looming colonialism but also

¹¹ For further discussion on the emergence of the term Japanization, who the Japanizers were and how they conceptualized their ideas and enacted them including Japan’s presence in Ethiopia and the Ethiopian delegation in Japan, see Clarke III; Salvadore 127-136; Bahru *Society, State and History* particularly chapter 4; *Pioneers of Change*; Alemayehu “Macroeconomic Modeling” 1-18; Addis; Heruy.

in light of coloniality, the global terms of trade and the precarious condition in which Ethiopians had to live.

Nevertheless, Gebre-Hiwot's contempt for women and certain ethnic groups is untenable. For instance, while his contemporary Deressa Amente, an Oromo language speaker, was trying to open schools and reflecting on the condition of modernity in *Berehan ena Selam* (Light and Peace) newspaper, Gebre Hiwot condemned Oromos as people with "inferior knowledge." As much as he was part of Ethiopian exceptionalism when he narrated the old story of Abyssinian historiography (long history of the Christian-Amhara-Tigray/Agaw imperial state), Gebre-Hiwot negotiated western colonial modernity through Pan-Ethiopian nationalism. Yet Gebre-Hiwot and most of his contemporary Abyssinian intellectuals did not account for the conquest and the attendant violence that the state committed against the many ethnic groups who were annexed into the empire in late nineteenth century. The rise of ethno-nationalist politics in the 1970s against Abyssinian nationalism needs to be viewed in light of a local-global nexus of power. Though the question of domination based on ethnicity is historically valid for the elites of Abyssinian empire and their soldiers dispossessed various groups, the ways in which identity has been politicized have obfuscated the coloniality of power and the problem of global-local raced-sexed-gendered inter/subjectivity. Whereas these kinds of crisscrossed postcolonial conditions inform Ethiopian lived experiences, competing nationalisms, what I call uncritical Pan-Ethiopian and ethnic nationalisms (ethno/nationalisms), paradoxically invoke the same phrase: "burden of history."

The Burden of *Burden of History* in Ethiopia

Ethiopia wrestled with a “historical burden” that “impede[d]” its “present policies,” Czeslaw Jesman wrote in 1963 presenting the country as “an ancient polity [that faced difficulties in] adjusting itself to the modern world.” Jesman aligned Ethiopia with Japan and Iran in “trac[ing] its direct lineage to the beginning of the Christian era.” In so doing, he alienated Ethiopia from the rest of Africa and attached it to Middle Eastern and East Asian history. As Fikru Gebre Kidan aptly captures it, this representation of the past follows a Eurocentric epistemology that posits Africa “as a place where nothing of significance transpired without the help of outside agents” (7-8). Fikru elaborates that “the northern half of Ethiopia was seen as more Middle Eastern than African” so that it could be “worthy of scholarly attention” (8). Indeed this long-standing scholarship “has had ripple effects on national politics and identity” (Ibid). For Jesman, since Ethiopia racially and culturally belongs to the Middle East, “Ethiopia is the oldest African country, yet in many respects, it is *in* Africa, rather than *of* Africa” (10).

Passing through the tests of colonialism (in the Italo-Ethiopian wars in 1896 and from 1936-1941), the Ethiopian empire forged its Pan-African politics engaging with issues of race and repositioning itself along the lines of nationalist movements in the rest of Africa. However, for writers like Jesman, the move only shows how Ethiopia was caught between its ancient history and its attempt to be a modern pan-African state. Jesman takes Ethiopia’s re-articulation of its identity as a Pan-African nation as an example of a crisis. Hence, what he considers as the “burden of history” is a thousand years of pedigree whose *longue durée* takes a toll on modern Ethiopia, which, in his

view, could neither be European nor African. This raced categorization informs today's politics of autochthony for the Semitic thesis positions ethnic groups like Oromos and Somalis as "strangers" (Getachew H). Despite the fact that confrontations among ethnic groups have been taking place in the name of unity and/or self-determination, including secession, the discourse of race is always already embedded in them.

One could trace the invention of Ethiopia as a racially exceptional ancient empire in Hegel's conception of history. According to Hegel, Egypt does not just have history but a long history that "reaches to 2207 years before Christ" (133-220). It seems that Hegel assigns an even greater *historical value* to Ethiopia when he says that Egypt "probably received its culture from Ethiopia" (Ibid). For Hegel, Africa "is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature," and the "Historical movement" that he ascribes to Egypt and Ethiopia is not of "African Spirit" but that of the "Asiatic or European world" (117). However, given that Ethiopia is closer to what Hegel calls Africa proper – space of immaturity and darkness – its temporal and spatial markers turn out to be enigmatic. In this imaginary, Ethiopia is neither Africa nor Europe. Hegel places Ethiopia in non-being. Yet Hegel's discussion about Egypt and Ethiopia does not defy but support the fact that Africa lies "beyond the day of self-conscious history," and its black men "sink down to a mere Thing" (109, 112). This invention of Africa as "an object of no value," or what Aimé Césaire calls "thingification," does not just exile consciousness from an African body but makes it necessary for her/him to be "gradually" "humanized/civilized" by the Europeans (142). This still necessitates thinking about subjectivity by keeping the tension between the

human and the animal (since, for Hegel, the human's "*first nature*" is "mere animal existence") and by relating the question to the category of THING-ness or the non-human (Hegel 55). Although today's Ethiopian discourses of identity speak in the language of ethnicity, what is embedded in them is a racial binary of Habasha and Cushites, citizen and stranger, native and foreigner/colonialist, host and alien/guest, sacred/defiled (connotes a dead animal), and human/beast.¹²

Yet Ethiopian Studies has not taken seriously the category of race thus far, saying that there is not a real racial category in Ethiopia. While I understand that local epistemologies and lived experiences need to be kept in the forefront, the notion of the *local* and the *real* should be rethought given that the boundary between the global and local is so porous. More important, positivism and its methodology inform the ways in which traditional historiography represents the past. Hegel's understanding of Man as a Universal Spirit is intertwined with his conception of history as a progress in time towards that White Man's world (positivist temporality) and the ability of this Spirit to move in spaces whereas the other (African bodies) are fixed in place (the Torrid zone). This temporal and spatial dimension of colonial historiography and the attendant biological-geographical definition of being human are not limited to Semitist historiography but still embedded in the methodology of traditional historiography in general. Uncritical Pan-Ethiopianists and ethno-nationalists deploy this methodology despite their different interpretations of Ethiopia's past. Notwithstanding the historical

¹² Semiticist scholarship that estranges peoples who have lived in the southern, southwestern, and eastern parts of present-day Ethiopia include many but here I add some. See, for instance, Conti-Rossini qtd in Teshale *Making of Modern Ethiopia* 66; Ullendorff; G. Haile 465-487; Gebre-Hiwot. For ethnonationalist scholars who follow the same logic of exclusion in the name of addressing the injustices perpetrated by the Semiticist violence, see Assefa *Oromia and Ethiopia* 1993; Tsegaye A. "The Special Interest" 2016.

inequalities that marginalized certain ethnic groups, both historiographies (Pan-Ethiopian and ethno-nationalist) cite from positivism and they employ similar methodologies.¹³ This instigates violence. Because it retains categorizations saturated in the very colonial historiography that invented natives and foreigners, the seemingly ‘ethnic’ question has always already morphed into a racial issue. The discourses invented by Abyssinian elites, those who consider themselves as ‘Habeshas’ or ‘Tigreans’ and ‘Amharas’ (note that these categories are discursively constructed and morphed through time-space) estranged many ethnic groups who are considered to be non-Habeshas. This discourse takes the Abyssinian myth of origin that traces its geneology to South Arabia and/or Israel for granted. Setting forth to critique this exclusive narrative, uncritical ethnonationalist discourse ironically reifies the same logic considering the ‘Habeshas’ foreigners and depicting what it terms the Kushitic people as natives of the land. Due to this epistemic violence (also because of the current political turmoil in the country) the sporadic conflicts seem to be even more gruesome as genocide looms large.

Consider how racial categorization was used in Rwandan mass killings. According to Mahmood Mamdani, Hutus marked Tutsis as aliens and killed them as *Inyenzi* (cockroaches) together with the Hutu Opposition as their “objective accomplices,” *abeyitso* (*Victims* 203). Then mass killings became easy. Following a conception of genocide, as articulated by Mamdani in the Tutsi-Hutu conflict, I would

¹³ This is not to flatten the two, however. I understand that ethnic domination in Ethiopia is a historical material condition that resulted from local imperial conquest whose formation needs to be viewed in relation to the encroachment of global capitalism. I am also aware of the fact that cultural and economic elites of the Abyssinian state, *mutatis mutandis*, have still been enjoying privileges from the residues of the former empire. Yet fundamental changes, such as the 1975 nationwide land reform that disrupted both the feudal as well as ethnic domination in Ethiopia, need to be acknowledged. Since 1991 new ethnic-religious heteropatriarchal alliances have also been forged, dis/avowing various groups according to the economy of loyalty the state apportions.

say genocide has already begun in Ethiopia. Now, in Ethiopia, names such as *erkus* (Amharic - evil/a dead animal), *bineensa* (Oromo language - beast) and *jib* (Amharic - hyena) have been circulating, making people anxious as they may re-mark ethnicized-racialized-gendered-sexed bodies and instigate violence (Surafel “Ethiopia”). To complicate the matter and to make situations worse, this enigmatic politics of ethnicity masks and reproduces other forms of violence perpetrated based on gender, sexuality, religion, class, and capital. It also shatters the chance to develop other ways of knowing and robs us of new languages to talk about complex local-global conditions.

Fearing that Ethiopia would collapse amid the ethnic tensions, in 2002, Allesandro Triulzi put forth the proposition that Ethiopia is “a country ‘overburdened’ by its past.” Triulzi discusses the issue of origin or narrative of “we came first” by showing how the “university [Pan-Ethiopian] historians” are conflicted with “diaspora [ethno-nationalist] historians” (280-286). Indeed such a danger has been looming and has been cutting bodies for so long. For instance, currently, while Ethiopia finds itself in the transition from authoritarian rule to ‘democracy,’ with all the attendant confusions, hope, and skepticism, 1.7 million people have been internally displaced and barbaric acts of killings have been taking place (OCHA 1-6; 1-11; Aaron). Nonetheless, these conflicts should not be examined just as “ethnic clashes” but as historical material relations informed by local-global power relations.

Yet Triulzi’s warnings still resonate strongly. In order to advance this discussion, however, we need to complicate the idea of “the university” and “diaspora” for the boundaries between them are porous in many ways. It should be noted that there are

‘diasporic historians’ who use foreign universities as their base and are part of the Western episteme. There are ethno-nationalist writers at Addis Ababa University. More important, conventional historiographical sensibilities, which originated in and are epitomized by the Western(centric) University, inform the narratives of both the diasporic and Ethiopian historians. Without addressing these issues, Triulzi presents his argument: “Until the ‘we came first’ temptations which strengthened the old mythology of traditional Ethiopia is abandoned by all [...], there will not be peace in the Horn” (286). In what he terms an exigent “battle for Ethiopia’s past,” the historiographic remedy that Triulzi suggests is “seeing the past ‘in the round’ [which] is a service to the ‘moral economy’ of our respective communities” (Ibid). Positioning himself as part of “a professional body,” Triulzi calls for “the value of understanding more of our past at a collective level.” Nevertheless, he does not explicate what he means by “we” as he questions neither the emergence of “professional history” in Europe nor the workings of an empire that ontologically dis/avows privileges according to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, and class/labor.¹⁴

Here, I am not calling for a wholehearted/half-admitted self-positioning as Christopher Clapham does when he says, “I have absorbed [the ‘History of (Greater) Ethiopia’] and in a very small way contributed to it, myself” (38). That could only lead Clapham to ask, “what is this [Ethiopian] history?” but not to the query, *what is history?* For Clapham, “‘History’” can simply be defined as “the story of the past, told from the

¹⁴ This reflection is directly related to Triulzi’s article on Ethiopia historiography. I do acknowledge the critical works that he has done including his project with East African immigrants in Italy. One should also see his critique on Italy’s amnesia on its colonial history, despite my critique of his ‘historiography,’ which would still call for attention to imperial epistemology and international division of labor.

perspective of the present” (37). In spite of being different from a Rankean conception of history in that it takes note of the role of politics/ideology in the present, when defined this way particularly by non-Ethiopian scholars, “History” turns out to be doubly enigmatic. Why? Because such a view confines the problematic of historiography to local (Ethiopia) or regional (the Horn) predicaments, obfuscating the global imperial relations that animate the old epistemic battle at the site of History. One should also ask: how should one approach the politics in the present moment? Unless we problematize the notion of temporality and spatiality that is embedded in history writing, we will not be able to understand subjectivities and re/production of relations of production.

The other historian who uses the term *the burden of history* to raise the issues of relations of production is Gebru Tareke in his 1991 book *Power and Protest: Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century*. Gebru, who participated in the 1974 Marxist-Leninist revolution, opens his argument by saying: “There are few countries in Africa that are enriched and burdened by the past as Ethiopia” (*Ethiopia* xiii). Gebru’s idea of ‘burden’ emanates from his writing, which commits itself to Ethiopia’s “longevity” and uniqueness in Africa “avert[ing] colonial occupation.” He presents Ethiopia’s past as a fortune and a problem. In Gebru’s view, the peasantry is caught in this dialectics without being “entirely docile.” Even though he considers Marxian dialectics, the procedures of history writing are not called into question. Rather Gebru employs the traditional methods in his works. He writes history in view of “closing the gap” and “tell[ing] an epic story” by “making a special effort” to “keep [his] bias to a minimum” (*Revolution* xiv). Gebru’s philosophical commitment to methodologies of social sciences (keeping

one's bias to a minimum) and History (closing gaps with new themes and evidence; inventing an epic story out of epochal episodes) did not allow him to unsettle history as a positivist discipline/profession.

Bahru Zewde also used the trope of “the burden of history” in July 1994 in a paper that he first gave at the History Workshop Conference that was organized by the University of Witwatersrand and later published in edited books in 1999 and in 2008 (“Burden” 323-346). In his paper titled “The Burden of History: The Constraints and Challenges of the Democratization Process in Ethiopia,” Bahru assesses what he terms “the overbearing weight of authoritarianism and orthodoxy in Ethiopian society” and “weaker” forms of “countervailing tendencies” (341). Though this is an interesting subject in which Bahru deals with the nexus between African professional history and politics, I am interested in his conception of the “burden of history.” Bahru's conception of ‘the tyranny of the past’ is entangled with his idea of history. He writes:

We are and we are not prisoners of our past. We are prisoners to the degree we do not properly understand it. And we are not to the extent that we can properly analyze it and avoid its pitfalls. True historical knowledge liberates because it saves one from repeating past mistakes. The challenge in Ethiopia is to escape the tyranny of the past, not to repeat it. (Ibid)

The idea of “prison” is central in this understanding of “the tyranny of the past” in Ethiopia. Fleeing from this imprisonment is possible but it hinges on avoiding replication of the “past.” The way out is “proper” and “true historical knowledge.” As much as it seems to be a conception that tries to understand lived experiences and their

repercussions in the present, this idea of history, I argue, emanates from a positivist understanding of time and of “truth” that does not account for spatiotemporal dialectics. Temporality is compartmentalized into distinct periods – past and present. This is evident in Bahru’s terms, which measure “liberat[ion]” in avoiding “repeating past mistakes.” Indeed one can take a lesson from what she did. However, to think of history in terms of happenings in the past amounts to imprisoning lived experience in *past time*. It elides the workings of power/knowledge that make certain events intelligible in the present time-space. In this case, the question would be what is this so-called “true historical knowledge?” How does one know and “analyze” the past “properly?” Answering that question demands epistemological engagement with *history* itself as a historically known field of study.

Ironically, the only historian who mentions that *history as a discipline* could be theorized as a *burden*, though tangentially and antithetically, is Bahru Zewde. Paraphrasing and reproducing Georg G. Iggers’ views on historiography, Bahru briefly discusses the “postmodernist challenge” on the “Rankean paradigm.” In his footnote, he refers to the works of Hayden White, in particular, to the chapter “The Burden of History” in *Tropics of Discourse*, without analyzing what White means by “burden.” Hayden White attacks Rankean objectivity saying that disinterested study of the past “for its own sake” is neither “ennobling” nor “illuminative” (*Tropics* 40). What matters rather for critical historians is to “transform historical studies” by partaking “positively in the liberation of the present from *the burden of history*” (41). In other words, according to Hayden, “the contemporary historian has to establish the value of the study of the past,

not as an end in itself, but as a way of providing perspectives on the present that contribute to the solution of problems peculiar to our own time” (Ibid). In this regard, the burden is not the past time as such but the ways in which conventional history understands, thereby, defines temporality.

Of course, White is concerned with the “[c]ontemporary Western man” and he considers Hegel as a man who “interpreted the burden of the historian as a moral charge to free men from the burden of history.” White is one of the postmodern thinkers who reinscribe the logic of modernity, albeit differently, when they take Europe on its own terms failing to challenge its dialectical, heteropatriarchal, capitalist, and colonial relations with non-Europeans. Hegel labeled the non-European other not only as childish immature spirit but also as a non-human (animal and thing) or sub-human. This begs the question: What is new in White’s articulation of Hegelian idea of the human as “a new embodiment or mode of Spirit” (49).

Bahru Zewde neither talks about White’s idea of a *burden* nor offers a critique of his own vision of the present humanity. He gives us a general sketch on how the “postmodernist” critique enquired into “the fundamentals of modern historiography [and] its claim to scientific status” (“Century” 16) Also drawing on Nietzsche’s “nihilism,” which “questioned humanistic and rationalistic assumptions of the Enlightenment,” Bahru seems to align himself with the “postmodern” “scepticism” that results from the ordeals the world experienced in “the first half of the twentieth century that shattered the faith in the linear progression of mankind, from low to high and from bad to good” (Ibid). Bahru never addresses how these philosophical debates impact African/Ethiopian

historiography, thereby, his own treatment of History. Without acknowledging the heterogeneity of postmodern thought and by sending postcolonial discourse on history to oblivion, Bahru paraphrases Iggers's idea that "the postmodernist critique of standard historiography" tends to smudge "the distinction between history and fiction" and between what Iggers terms "honest scholarship and propaganda." The only "positive side" that Bahru could recuperate from a postmodernist critique is "the scientific limits of historical investigation and the literary potentials of historical narrative" (Ibid). Without showing what exactly those limits are and how he would speak to them, Bahru asserts after Edmund Burke that "the best literary historians had always combined factual investigation and creative imagination" (Ibid).

Uncanny Kinship: History, Philosophy, Politics, and Creative Narrative

Since Bahru posits history as a narrative that employs creative imagination to engage with a postmodern critique on traditional historiography, it seems that he is pushing the boundary of a Rankean concept of history. Yet, in the last work in which he 'narrates' and 'analyzes' "The Ethiopian Student Movement," Bahru even claims – in a bold Rankean move - that an event in the past is "not a philosophical issue" but "a historical phenomenon" (*Quest* 9). If we follow his method that undergrids his narratives, we see that Bahru cannot not to have a philosophy of history, however. This is evident when he writes in *Quest*, the book he published in 2014:

In the immortal words of the great German historian Ranke, [an event] has to be recorded first and foremost 'the way it exactly happened,' and not how it should have been. As such, any evaluation of the movement has to

be based as far as possible on an exhaustive investigation of the available evidence, oral as well as documents. (Ibid)

Given that Bahru was part of the 1974 Marxist student movements in Ethiopia, it is obvious that he would not subscribe to the kind of politics that Ranke endorsed in sustaining the *status quo* of (the nineteenth-century German) state and church. He is, for that matter, one of the foremost scholars who attempted to participate in a critical discussion on the writing of history at a time when scholars were still writing extensively on Ethiopian modern ‘history’ in a Rankean style without engaging in theoretical and methodological debate. He also follows scholars like Jan Vansina in making use of oral narratives and establishing them as legitimate sources (“Response” 187-198). Indeed, Jan Vansina’s contribution in his field is immense in that he was fighting against colonial historians and their written archival sources. Further, Vansina did not just employ oral stories in the writing of history but worked to recuperate other African knowledge about history (*Living* 40-60; *Oral* 27-32). Although he is mostly invested in extensive “data” gathering, Bahru also does an “exercise in oral history” (*Documenting* 5-6). However, on top of the hierarchization apparent in his works, his methodology is limited to “sifting and verification” of sources, particularly oral history. Ethiopian historiography is thus yet to engage with serious conversations about the *conceptualization* and the *place* of sources (be it archive or repertoire/embodied) in history (writing) (Ibid).

Reflecting on Bahru’s book, *Quest*, Messay Kebede denounces Bahru for denying him the right to theorize as a philosopher because the latter argues that the event (for example, the Ethiopian student movement) needs to be taken just as “a historical

phenomenon” but not as “a philosophical issue” (“Rejoinder” 176). Messay also critiques Bahru’s work as punctured by “theoretical poverty,” being unable “to analyze from a level surpassing mere narration” (Ibid). Appreciating the “progress achieved by social sciences and philosophy,” Messay points out that the “objectivity of a scholarly study” hinges on “unravel[ing] real motives rather than on how well it reproduces the illusions of the time” (178). Indeed, Messay questions the ideology that would inform the way in which an archive is arranged but only insofar as objectivity is at work to discern “real motives.” Messay does not question how social science and philosophy historically inform the ways in which distanced scholarship reveals/conceals realities and what “objectivity” is at work. He then participates in reifying Eurocentrism despite his major claim that the Marxist students were entrapped by the Eurocentric knowledge that contributed to an inability to recuperate alternative ways of knowing and to the perpetration of violence (*Radicalism* 37-54). Basically, Messay produces a logic similar to, if not the same as the logic that Bahru deploys. That is why both end up in valorizing, what they definitively call “The 1974 Ethiopian Student Movement” as an object - the ultimate mover and shaker of the revolution, despite their critique against it. Such an “overrepresentation” of the student movements of the 1974 revolution reached at its peak when Andreas Eshete writes that “The Ethiopian Student Movement” is not just the initiator of the 1974 revolution but also the midwife of Ethiopian modernity (Andreas “Modernity”).

The most forceful critique against Pan-Ethiopian history writing comes from Semir Yusuf who argues that “Every (*hi*) *story of the nation, the “motherland”, is*

(hi)story of the present” (“Historying” 381). Attacking Ethiopian “positivist historiography,” Semir formulates his analytic framing that he calls “historying” in which he refers to the “(hi)story telling and (hi)story making at once” (Ibid). In showing history is at once representation of the past and construction of a reality, Semir unsettles the causative narration of historians by engaging one of Bahru Zewde’s seminal works, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1991*. Semir uncovers how Pan-Ethiopian discourses invent the nation as real. This is an important move in that it interrogates history as a theory and practice. It allows us to see the vicissitudes of inventing the past and the present re/producing problems in the everyday.

However, Semir does not have a meaningful engagement with “post-modernism” as a “paradigm.” He could have articulated his ideas more had he engaged with what he meant by and why he deployed terms like “teleology,” without conflating it with ‘causation’ and without assuming an ontological negativity of the term. By doing so, he would have also profited more from and rigorously pushed the boundaries of postmodernist discourses than he did in attempting to forge a loosely theorized notion of “(hi)storying.” More important, he could have related it with his field of studies, political science, to complicate the political and scientific stake found in both disciplines. Then we would know better what does it mean to say ‘history making’ is a political discursive project that manipulates the past. In other words, one would ask, what is the political in stating that the “historian narrates the past from the political perspective (general or otherwise) he/she currently subscribes to, as well as cages all his/her ideas in concepts he/she now knows” (Ibid).

Although the critique of positivist historiography is political on its own, leaving it there without engaging what new methodology could inform our engagement with the past may come to be what J. D. Y. Peel calls “presentist” perspective (11-132). Such a view has its own historicity in that it disavows other ways of knowing the past, particularly oral traditions. In a related view but with an advanced argument, Arjun Appadurai critiques the assumption that “the past is wholly susceptible to contemporary purpose” which is “widespread in contemporary anthropology” by showing how the past is not just “an infinite and plastic symbolic resource” but a “scarce” one, for the notion of abundant past is riddled with the “culturally variable” mode of “permissibil[ity]” (201-219). Meaning, the ways in which power makes certain events intelligible in the present renders the past scarce.

Building on these critiques, I would say that such kinds of critical discourses, with all their limitations, are rare; positivist scholarship still haunts and informs the current Ethiopian historiography. Coupled with this problematic, most of the teaching, advising, and writing of history in Ethiopian universities (through seminars and publications, which are the methods and vehicles for the hegemony of history) and in everyday relations continue to shadow and be shadowed by Hegelian and Rankean sensibilities.

Witnessing how a “biocentric disciplinary paradigm” wreaks havoc on lives, Demetrius L. Eudell advises, it is important to pay equal attention to the “work of history” and the “history of work.” Hence, I will discuss the current valorization of

ethnicity as an object in view of what work of history is at work and analyze an artistic work staged in the middle of identity and development politics (22).¹⁵

‘To Be or Not to Be’: Composing an Object, Decomposing the Other

“The Shakespearean ‘to be or not to be’ aptly characterizes contemporary Ethiopian politics,” writes Adhana Haile Adhana in 1994 to rationalize the role of “revolutionary democracy” and discursively invent the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) as the main actor who is destined to play the politics of ‘to be.’ The Tigrean People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) strategically designed and organized EPRDF bringing together the former fighters of the Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (EPDM) and prisoners of war (POW) captured in the fight with the military regime. When its military victory gained momentum, TPLF re/doctored the coalition, giving Pan-Ethiopian and ethnonational appearance to its collaborators.

Accordingly, EPDM was first designed to serve as a Pan-Ethiopian wing but later changed into an ethnic front re-baptized as the Amhara People’s Democratic Movement (ANDM) along with the other front, the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO), which was made to recruit mainly the POW (ex-combatants of the military junta). Following the principle designed by TPLF before it came to power, the state was to be reorganized having various nations and nationalities that would be represented only by one political organization/front. Accordingly, ANDM would represent the second largest ‘ethnic group’ called Amhara while OPDO was made to represent the largest “ethnic group,” the Oromo. Both the conceptions of ethnicity and the political

¹⁵ Eudell states this by drawing on Levi-Strauss 245-269; F.R. Ankersmit, 137 & 152. David Chalmers qtd in Wynter “Sociogenic Principle” 31.

organization worked from the site of homogeneity. Later establishing various ethnic-based political parties, TPLF enlarged the coalition that it created using the above-mentioned three organizations. It is this re-organization of the state as “an all-inclusive state-nation: a new unity in diversity” that Adhana Haile Adhana calls “the politics of ‘to be’ [alias] revolutionary democracy” (28).

Its seed implanted in the 1970s Ethiopian leftist movements, the term “revolutionary democracy” has been co-opted, sanctioned, sung, performed, spoken, echoed, loved, mocked, hated, and rejected, remaining ambivalent especially in its twenty-seven years of circulation in the public space. For almost three decades, revolutionary democracy, as the politics of ‘to be or not to be,’ did not account for the Shakespearean tragic precariousness, but subscribed to a Manichean rigid worldview. Even when he is analyzed as a “neurotic,” Hamlet is not caught between the binary of action and inaction but stays as an active character who straddles between the two states as he acts in the process. Situating him in a social world, rather than in a mere cognitive space, C.L.R James tells us that Hamlet is “the embodiment between social duty and freedom of thought” (244). Yet, Adhana does not glean a complex political work from Hamlet’s performance but instead depoliticizes Shakespeare in order to establish a binary discourse of primordial identity politics.

Adhana invoked the notion of the “burden of history” when this ideology was crafted as a forceful discourse. Adhana opens his article paraphrasing Jesman’s words: Ethiopia is “a country burdened with its past” (12). Reiterating what Gebru Tareke also said about the burden that the country shouldered, Adhana insists that “[i]f this is the

case, history more than any other discipline, must inform our understanding of contemporary Ethiopian politics” (Ibid). Until he later assumed a vice minister position at the Ministry of Education, Adhana served at the Department of History at Addis Ababa University. Following the conventional historiographical procedures, Adhana delves into the recesses of the ancient ‘history’ of Ethiopia or Christian Abyssinia. Like Gebru, he insists on ‘discontinuity’ but only to create epic stories about regions and people’s ethnic and religious “indivisible identities” (12-29). Adhana discusses how Ethiopia has been mutating, through centuries of divergent and convergent forces, as a “state-nation,” “state-nation-state,” “empire-state,” and “state-nation” (Ibid).

The theme of his story is that Tigray, which he counted as part of the older Christian Abyssinia (the northern part of present-day Ethiopia), became a separate political entity once the Shewan rule took the center stage in Ethiopia and became oppressive through “empiriz[ing]” itself. Adhana weaves his plots until he makes sure that the Shewan (Amharic speaking) rule becomes hegemonic with the coming to power of Menelik II and the subsequent ascendance of Shewan aristocrats. Particularly, Adhana portrays King Haile Selassie’s rule as part of the Shewan rule not only as a regional oppressive power but also as a phenomenon that marks the rise of Amhara dominance. Although Tigray was using Amharic as the *lingua franca* of Abyssinian empire and despite the fact that there were regional rivalries between the Amharic speaking (with different dialects) Gojam, Gondar, Wollo, and Shewa, both inhabitants of the central part of Ethiopia (Shewa) and other regions of the country who speak Amharic are marked as oppressors. This act also strategically absolved the Tigrean aristocrats/elites who

participated in the establishment and maintenance of the Abyssinian empire. Hence, Adhana's historical narration sets forth to establish "indivisible identities" of oppressors and the oppressed or compatriots and the enemy.

Coupled by the historical situation, particularly TPLF's altercation with another guerilla fighters' group called Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) after a short honeymoon that both had in the beginning of the 1990s, Adhana marked OLF as part of the politics of 'not to be.' It is vital to quote Adhana at length given that this Manichean framing informs for the last twenty-seven years the politics of citizenship and the economy, expunging questions of gender, sexuality, class, capital, religion, and even ethnicity in its genuine and critical conception. He states:

The politics of 'not to be' consists, whatever the nuances or shades of opinion within each, of two variants: chauvinistic nationalism and a nationalism of withdrawal [OLF was forced to leave the country after it went to armed conflict with TPLF-EPRDF]. Both, despite their apparent irreconcilability, are offshoots of the politics of the Shewan aristocracy (old and new). They share the same thought patterns and frames of mind: hate and exclusiveness. Both misunderstand, or cannot reconcile themselves to, revolutionary democracy – the politics of 'to be.' (28)

The axis of Ethiopian politics has been therefore revolving around a politicization of ethnicity on primordial premises. Indeed, political groups and individuals articulated this kind of politics in the 1974 revolution. The imperial conquest led by Menelik II violently destroyed lives, wounded bodies, dispossessed people who lived south of the Abyssinian

empire, took their lands and made them serfs on their own lands, instating new forms of rule and culture on the newly conquered spaces.¹⁶ Haile Selassie I structurally sustained these oppressions in the subsequent regimes. It needs to be noted, however, that the relation between the so-called north and south of the Abyssinian Christian empire was crisscrossed and that there were conflicts, tensions, and negotiations within and across these spaces.

However, the Marxist revolution and the radical changes that the military rule took starting from its ascendance to power dismantled entrenched structures of power. The proclamation that gave “land to the tiller” was almost unanimously appreciated despite the irregularities observed during the implementation and the subsequent land tenure, which privileged the state across the nation. This historical development has not been given any scholarly attention and considered as a void in Ethiopian history. TPLF-EPRDF invented and used this void as a tabula rasa on which it writes the script of ethnic federalism by way of assuming or creating the impression that the military rule sustained the “Amhara domination.” Yet, it needs to be noted that those who have benefited discursively and materially from the narratives of Greater Ethiopia or Christian Abyssinia (with all its historicist and patriarchal metanarratives) denigrate any question about ethnic, religious, and gender-sexuality domination in Ethiopia. Due to such bi-polar tension, Ethiopian politics has been revolving around uncritical bifurcated oppositions between Pan-Ethiopian and ethno-nationalist forces relegating it to irrelevance. Amid such an impoverished altercation that pervades almost every social milieu, TPLF has been amassing wealth, capturing the state and collapsing the boundaries between the

¹⁶ For further discussion on the subject see all the chapters in this work, Donham and W. James.

state, government, and party-owned businesses (1467-1483). What makes the paradox glaring is that these groups claim that they are offshoots of the 1974 Marxist revolution and that they still fight for the poor and against neoliberal forces in the name of “revolutionary democracy.” In order to institute such relations of domination, the narrative of identity politics has to collapse the confused state of mind and sociogeny in which we find Hamlet. Here I want to present an excerpt from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in one soliloquy of Act III, Scene I:

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
 And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
 No more; and, by a sleep to say we end. (Lamb 103)

The above excerpt shows how the question does not start with “to be.” And the phrase “not to be” does not imply the end of Hamlet’s life even if he were to die, for that realm of not-being is an unknown world. More important the question of human dignity and social duty are presented as ethical issues in the middle of multiple tensions Hamlet has to keep and pass through/away. However, in Ethiopia, the identity politics in question appropriated the terms “to be or not to be” to construct a binary between Life and Death. Politically unethical and aesthetically violent appropriation, this formulation creates a binary between life (good) and death (bad). The danger of this dichotomy is that there are bodies always already marked as good and bad. Because “bad” bodies are considered as

threatening to life, the binary makes it necessary for the state to torture and kill them.

Invoking Armageddon in the absence of forces of Life, the narratives structure the draconian laws of the state and the attendant violence against any dissident. Yet Hamlet's thought and in/action do not signify a binary but rather confusion and tension. For thinkers like C. L. R. James, Hamlet is an embodiment of the tension between "individual freedom and social responsibility," "social duty and freedom of thought," and "the old and the new" (244).

Un-Critical Ethno/Nationalisms: Performing Traditional Historiography

In Ethiopia, I argue, one cannot fathom the ubiquity of both grand Ethiopian nationalism and ethno-nationalism without attending to performance arts (rituals, songs, plays, novels, etc.) and performativity (as we have it in Butler's discursive citation and as an embodied re-citation that result in reproduction of social/material relations). I want to bring three constellations together and keep them in tension so as to speak to the issue of historiography in my quest to construct critical epistemological infrastructure. I will explicate and examine three seemingly different but uncannily related discourses around Ethiopian nationalism, which not only reenact a Eurocentric progressive model of history but also shatter other avenues to freedom and subjectivity.

Uncritical Ethiopian nationalism has been obsessed with the local empire's dead kings, insisting on selectively remembering their anti-colonial struggle and so-called nation-building while they deliberately forget the atrocities that the emperors committed against the ancestors of the current ethnic groups through ruthless conquest (Donham and W. James). In the name of cultural preservation and transmission (industry), it hides what

Walter Benjamin calls the “barbarity” of its project of modernity/development. Even though it was politically defeated in 1991 when TPLF-EPRDF came to power and waged ethnic federalism, this discourse has still survived nay thrived. It does so not simply because it comes as a critique to the divisive politics of ethnicity that attacked ‘Ethiopian symbols,’ but also due to the fact that it prefers to continue to hail dead emperors and the tenacious Queen of Sheba narrative than to build empathy towards ethnic grievances which have their own historical material emergences. This narrative/practice wants neither to unlearn nor to learn.

Mainstream Pan-Ethiopianism promotes unity mainly through invocation of Ethiopia’s anti-colonial struggles and claiming of sameness (*and’nen – we are one*). Engrossed with its narrative of the history of independence/freedom (*yenetsanet tarik*), the supporters of this discourse are unwilling to decolonize its epistemology/power. Paradoxically enough, this discourse denies its dialectical relation with colonialism, which is a constitutive part of the nationalism/patriotism that it incites. The nation its supporters imagine and the patriarchal heroes they admire are invented through cultural productions that hinge on anti-colonial struggles. I would say, one cannot imagine Pan-Ethiopian passion without performance. Prominent plays were staged at Love of the Country and the Municipality (which later on changed itself to Haile Selassie I) theatre at the eve and in the wake of the Italo-Ethiopian war (1935-1941). It should be noted here that Love of the Country was originally established as an association to rally Ethiopian people against the Italian colonialist invaders. For a brief time before the 1935 Italian invasion, Love of the Country used war songs, poetry, plays, and public *diskur* (speech)

to galvanize support and agitate people to fight for their independence.

Love of the Country staged the following plays not only in Addis Ababa but also across the country: *Selamachin Yitsina* (Let Our Peace Be Consolidated), *Dir biabir Anbesa Yasir* (A Net of Webs Could Entrap a Lion), *Ye Eritrea Jegnoch* (Patriots of Eritrea), *Ethiopia Yihichi Nat* (This is Ethiopia), *Hagerihin Wuded* (Love Your Country), *Ye-Yekatit Eliqit* (The Massacre by Graziani), *Ye-Egziabher Chernet Ye Arbegnoch Jegininet* (Help of God – Patriots’ Bravery), *Netsanet Taddesse* (Our Liberation is Secured) and *Ye-Hager Fikir Tizitaw* (Memories of Love of Our Country) (“Stage” 26). The Municipality theatre, which was established after the second Italo-Ethiopian war, also reminisced about the bad days of Italian occupation as it re-united the people who had experienced a dramatic change in their lives. The Municipality produced the following ‘patriotic’ plays: *Afajeshign* (The Striking Lady), *Mekenetuan Tifta* (Let Her Be Married), *Akale* (Mine), *Nitsuh Dem* (Pure Blood), *Netsanet* (Freedom), *Ye’Yekatit Elkit* (The Massacre by Graziani), *Lager Memot* (Dying for a Country), and *Tewodros* (36). During the 1974 revolution, four short plays under one banner, *Atsim Beyegeitsu* (People’s Skeletons) were presented at the national theatre: *Yemekdela Sinibit* (Farewell at Mekdela – Tewodros’s soliloquy just before he took his own life not to lay down his arms to the British army), *Sekokaw Petros* (Passion of Peter – about a Priest martyr who refused to collaborate with the Italians and was shot by machine gun in Addis Ababa), *Tinsae Sendek Alama* (Revival of the Flag) and *Tilahun Gizaw* (a prominent student activist killed allegedly by Haile Selassie’s regime). These plays tended to show nationalism, patriotism and the deeds of the hero, Tilahun Gizaw of the student

movement.

After the Marxist military junta's administration consolidated itself and the state, arts proliferated but gradually came under totalitarian control. The military regime ordered every singer to produce at least one *yehager zefen* (song of the nation) whenever they produced an album. Due to the protracted war between the military government and various armed groups like the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, as well as the war with Somalia, artists were considered as if they were soldiers so that they would heed to any *gidaj* (obligation/mission) and agitate the army (*toru*) going to the war fronts (*ginbar*). *History* was staged everywhere. Anti-colonial heroes were resurrected and made to walk on stage. Menelik, Yohannes, Allula Aba Nega, Belay Zeleqe, Moges Asegedom, Zeray Deres, Simon Adefris, Empress Taytu, and others.

Yet no one was as popular as Emperor Tewodros. Because of the amplification of his humble origin as a son of a traditional medicine (*koso*) vendor, his commitment to modernize Ethiopia in the 1860s, and his relentless struggle against 'tradition' to unite a divided Ethiopia (implying that President Mengistu Haile-Mariam (mid 1970s-1991), who fought pro/secessionists, was like Tewodros who rose against regional lords/princes), Tewodros has been an all-time hero among the Pan-Ethiopianists. Tewodros has lived on the stage, on the radio, on television, in songs, and in novels. He still walks around due to artistic productions since Haile Selassie's time. Suffice it to say, a single play, Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin's *Tewodros* was running for six years at the Municipality theatre and touring around the country, including at war fronts.

Even though anti/colonialism informs their nationalism, people in the uncritical Pan-Ethiopian camp do not want to unsettle the colonial epistemology that impacted the history to which they un-critically subscribed. Whereas they call Ethiopia *enat hager* (a motherland), it is toxic masculinity that informed their patriotism. Be it under Haile Selassie's rule or that of Marxist military regime, Ethiopianism was monumentalized and it still seems resolute even after and because of the coming to power of TPLF, which endorsed ethnonationalism officially by attacking the Pan-Ethiopian discourse as chauvinist. Armored with old and new poetry, songs, dances, theatrical productions, textbooks, electronic and print media, professional and public histories in the country and in the diaspora (particularly in North America), this un-critical Ethiopian hegemonic narrative reduced differences to sameness. Its exponents seemed to forget, were unaware and/or did not want to remember the racist historiographic reproductions and the coloniality embedded in the names they embody like the term *habesha*, which was made to have a racially superior undercurrent in the Semitic discourse against which the others of the Ethiopian empire have been fighting. One of the major battles was staged on the terrain of the Ethiopian flag. In spite of the historicity of the flag and its service to the Ethiopian (particularly under Emperor Menelik and Haile Selassie) Christian Abyssinian (or *Habesha*) empire, which ruled over non-Christian peoples, Pan-Ethiopianists and their performances opted to think of it as the Christian symbol of rainbow painted across the sky (they call it a sign of promise God gives to Ethiopia). Some people, who self-identify with the so-called *Habesha* group, denigrate others who speak in languages other than Amharic and sometimes Tigrigna and suspect them as impure Ethiopians. Amharic and

Tigrigna are the two languages spoken by elites of Orthodox Christians (through time, other Ethiopian languages are being used in religious services), who at times claim similarity due to their Abyssinian history, that of the so-called highlanders whose emperors shared the Solomonic dynasty. Given that some Eritreans were also part of these ‘heritages,’ these groups also claim sameness despite their heterogeneity. Yet, since the coming to power of the Tigrigna speaking TPLF, the rift between these groups has been widening. These groups, particularly the Amharic-speaking hegemonic groups (heterogeneous in their own terms, though) despise other Ethiopians who claim to be of a certain ethnic group, labeling them “narrow ethno-nationalists.” However, it should be noted that the *Habesha* identity has been mutating through time and it would entail different meanings in different contexts. For instance, Ethiopians who live in North America would identify themselves as *Habesha* to negotiate the White Supremacist system that always assigns non-White bodies in the zone of blackness/otherness (Mohammed).

Secondly, there are un-critical ethno-nationalists who reify the logic of the abovementioned groups while they claim to fight for “equality.” Just as un-critical Pan-Ethiopianism is buttressed by scholarship and multiple performances, this discourse also has its academic articulations as well as performing arts. Gaining momentum since 1991, uncritical ethno-nationalist discourse absolved the Tigrayan elites’ cultural and economic privilege and most importantly held narrowly the ‘Shewan Amhara’ (those who live in central Ethiopia) by extension all Amharic speaking people who live in northern part of Shewa. Though this discourse sometimes mentions that the Amhara people (who are

invented as such as any ethnic group is) were also oppressed, its main import is hidden somewhere else. TPLF wanted to invent a larger camp called Amhara and another biggest one as Oromo (who were officially constructed as the two largest ethnic groups in 1995 through the Constitution). TPLF re-invented and marked 'Amharas' as chauvinists and Oromos as narrow nationalists because there are groups like the Oromo Liberation Front that wishes to secede from Ethiopia. (It needs to be noted, however, OLF has splitted into different political groups with changing aims).

Nevertheless, another Oromo group is also visible in the ethno-nationalist camp, which considers itself as native or Kushitic (black) race and the Amharic and Tigrigna speakers as aliens even as Caucasians. This discourse mainly forges the colonial thesis in which imperial Ethiopia particularly Emperor Menelik's nineteenth-century conquest participated in the scramble for Africa as a Trojan horse for European colonialism.¹⁷ This discourse critiques the cultural, political, and economic superiority of Abyssinians taking Menelik's conquest and annexation of many people into the Solomonic empire to reveal the multilayered oppression that Oromos and others suffered. It has recently created its own scholarship and built its oeuvres under an Oromo Studies Association bestowing a mission on itself to decolonize Ethiopian Studies as it develops its own. While this is overdue and important in many ways, the scholarship goes to the extent of twisting facts and forging Truth even out of the blue (what Bahru Zewde and others call invention of mythologies) in its determination to invent Oromia as a nation that had existed before

¹⁷ Among the Oromo ethnonationalist and non-Ethiopian scholars, the following are the major ones who argue for the colonial thesis in Ethiopia, taking Menelik II (1844-1913) as a dependent-colonialist or a surrogate for European colonialism recounting in particular the atrocities suffered by Oromos during and after Menelik's conquest: Mohammed Hassen; Holcomb and Sisai; Asafa Jalata "The Modern World-Economy" 59-80; *Oromia and Ethiopia*; "The Oromo" 17-27; Sorenson.

Menelik's conquest ("Century" 34). Being a mirror image of the un-critical Ethiopianists, this discourse has been using the Semitic/Kushitic dichotomy and performing its politics around the native/settler, host/guest, *habesha/kush* binaries. This autochthonic ethno-nationalist group has conscripted thousands of supporters and many have been singing and composing poetry around and for this politics.

This autochthonic group supports the existing Constitution not just because it acknowledged (at least in the law) the historically marginalized ethnic groups but because it has made it obligatory for anyone to have an ethnic identity to be citizen since the "sovereign power" rests on none other than "nations, nationalities, and people" ("Proclamation" 4). Even though the Constitution has certain openings to argue otherwise and look for ways in which citizenship cannot be defined by and confined to ethnicity, scholars of this camp are discursively constructing law as superior to ideology as if it were outside of politics ("The Special Interest"). In so doing, the group has marked those who do not claim any ethnicity as homeless, arguing that these kinds of people do not even have a soil to rest their foot since the existing ethnic federalism has already spatialized Ethiopia in such a way that it is only the nine states (*kililoch*) who have their own lands.

This discussion came to the fore especially when the Addis Ababa Master Plan was rejected by many Oromo-speaking people mainly because the capital city had already dispossessed more than one hundred thousand Oromo farmers, men, women, and children, who live around the city (Ermias 96-129). Using the people's grievances certain Oromo-speaking elites made the Addis Ababa a "special interest" issue, which was

already stipulated in the Constitution anticipating future legal deliberations so as to decide what kind of relationship the city would have with Oromia since Addis Ababa is found *in* this State (“Proclamation” 18). Hence, for un-critical ethno-nationalists people who live in Addis Ababa are not guests but also homeless unless they claim a certain ethnicity. This argument is made, in a way, to justify that Oromia should administer the city. Whatever other political calculations there may be in it, what is interesting for me is the fact that *history* is the basis of this argument. Apart from its narration of “colonial” conquest, the discourse goes on to present a condescending account of the victory of Adwa and to present the emperor who led the anti-colonial war, Menelik II, as a colonialist who claimed to be Caucasian.¹⁸

The wider involvement of the people in protests that happened in various states of the current ethnic federal republic, particularly in the Amhara and Oromo regions, attested that they were against Tigrayan ethnic elite domination and that they needed freedom and equality in their economic as well as political lives. However, the re-presentation and re-articulation of those protests, which manifested themselves in blocking the economic activities of the state and the foreign business companies, have been informed by the reconstruction of history. Hence, I say, both un-critical Pan-Ethiopian and ethno-nationalist discourses, including TPLF’s seemingly middle ground position, are the same notwithstanding their oppositional stands. One is like ‘next-of-kin’ to the other not bio-logically but discursively: uncanny relations.

¹⁸ To have a glimpse of the debates outpouring in the electronic, print, and social media, see Tsegaye A. (“Why Resist”); Tedla (“Ultimate Goal”); Fikru (“Emperor Menelik”).

To say this, however, would not be original let alone philosophical. What I am proposing is that the two positions draw on similar philosophical and methodological sites, which are historically colonial/modern. Historicism is their hallmark as un-dialectical narrative is their procedure. If they think of dialectics, either it stops at Hegelian and Marxian thinking or at a simplistic notion of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. One scholar supported another who claimed that it is time for the Oromos to rule Ethiopia as Amharas and the Tigrayans had already had their shares (“The Oromo Alternative” 1-6). And another scholar said that this is, in fact, a testimony of dialectics as it shows movement in thesis-anti-thesis-synthesis. One may want to slam this formulation as linear, simplistic, and impoverished and one that does not even deserve any engagement. Yet it rides in multiple guises, abstracting realities.

The binary between native and settler has resulted in conflicts on the ground and ethnic cleansing has already been unleashed in various places. The performativity or materiality of discourse, in Butler’s use of the term, has created conditions whereby bodies attack bodies using various technologies of violence. Performance arts complicate performativity of power. State owned theatres have been participating in valorization of politics of ethnicity through ‘traditional’ ethnic music and dances to create a spectacle that camouflages or aestheticizes such realities. Banishing freedom of thought and alternative spaces of critical arts through its draconian laws like anti-terrorism, press, and non governmental organizations laws, the state decides on what should *appear* on stage.

Aestheticizing Reality: The 60th Anniversary of the National (Federal) Theatre

In thinking about freedom of thought, social justice and resistance against the

status quo, I want to ask, following Pedro Rocha de Oliveira: are a philosophical inquiry and artistic expressions anymore self-evident? Of course, the answer is no. But other questions arise: How and in what historical material conditions would philosophical inquiry and artistic expressions take place? Here I take a look at the 60th anniversary of the Ethiopian national theatre as an example to see how the state used performance to camouflage its oppression and to show other realities that bubble beneath the multiple abstractions of socio-cultural relations, as well as their political economy. Theorizing the “aestheticization of reality” by way of questioning the production of theory and art in late capitalism, Oliveira says this:

The fundamental accomplishment of ideology that is characteristic of the phenomena involved in the aestheticization of reality is the collapse of reality and experience into one another so that the specific effort involved in experiencing is repressed. But the specific domain of appearance is precisely that in which whatever takes place does so as experience: appearance qua appearance, as in art that assumes itself as such. It appears in certain circumstances to someone paying attention. (“Aestheticization” 273)

Oliveria helps us see how discourse plays a role in hiding realities somewhere else. In aestheticization of reality, ideology is deployed to alinate bodies from realizing the condition in which they live. This thinking is helpful to understand the 60th anniversary of the National Theatre that appears as experience while it hides multiple experiences of the performing bodies. In view of such an aestheticization of reality, I would like to expose

how the state choreography of “ethnic” dance and music obfuscates the wound that neoliberalism inflicts on the same bodies that dance the politics of identity and development. Aestheticization does not work outside of performativity in the sense that the utterance of a word heralds action, cites from prior scripts of power/knowledge, and results in (does) psychic and bodily damage.

As I have noted in the introduction, the separation of this kind of performativity from any kind of performance arts is vital if we are to be mindful of the historicity and materiality of bodies. That is an aspect of critical embodied historiography that accounts for coloniality of power. However, it is also important to see how these performativity and performance arts are crisscrossed. I am thinking about the performativity of performance arts that utter/perform words using the actors’ scripted bodies, which are not static but incessantly moving. Riddled by ideology, I hold, performance could be deployed calculatingly to deepen the aestheticization of reality, as it would critique power when it is in the hands of those who interrogate a given ideology. The Ethiopian state has been manipulating performance monopolizing the theatre, other performance spaces, and the streets. Yet scripted bodies find ways, use the available resources, and cite from dis/membered *bodies/texts* of liberation to alter their position. Hence, I want to keep the tension between active speeches, citationality, embodied performativity, and performance arts.

I attended the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Ethiopian National Theatre on November 13, 2015. More than one thousand people gathered at the theatre, including artists, ministers, ambassadors, and other governmental and non-governmental

organizations. Various performers presented musical and theatrical pieces that showed the ‘major’ works performed at the theatre since the beginning of the national (formerly known as Haile Selassie I) theatre. Two of the three masters of the ceremony (female and male) came to the stage and invited the vice minister of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (from the culture sector) to the stage to make a speech.¹⁹

Meaza Gabre-Medhin, a theatre arts graduate from Addis Ababa University and the vice minister of the cultural sector, opened her speech by extending a high admiration to all artists who had been serving in all genres of the arts. Coming to downstage right, she bowed to the audience to show her “gratitude” to the artists, and particularly to pay tribute to the senior performers. The audience gave her a big round of applause. Going back to the pulpit, she counted the sufferings the senior artists endured, the health problems they faced, not enjoying any benefit but the “audiences’ love.” She cautioned the new generation, including herself, that they had to be “knowledgeable” and “hardworking” without “losing their cultural base” for them not to let the senior performers’ effort go astray, instead to elevate the arts to a higher level. Then she reiterated the widely circulated or rather the clichéd language of the state. She said that the government paid due attention to the cultural and arts sector and that the artists had to tap into it in order to “promote and advance the cultural values of the [Ethiopian] nations and nationalities.” At last, she mentioned that the government was about to build a new

¹⁹ Following the ethnic-federal constitution and state structure, the theatre is considered as the main cultural center of the federal government, which has nine regional states. Thus, the director of the theatre is appointed by and accountable to the office of the Prime Minister. Yet, administratively, the theatre is accountable to the Ministry. Since positions in the Ministry are mostly due to political membership in one of the ethnic-based political organizations that constitute the coalition, EPRDF, the vice minister is a member of the ethnic-based party, Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), which is one major member in EPRDF.

theatre in the existing compound of the National Theatre.

The next official who came to the stage was the Speaker of the House of People's Representatives (HPR), Yalew Abate. Framing the mission of the theatre and underlining the notion of national/federal "responsibility," Yalew reiterated the objective and goals of the theatre which were, in his terms, "advancing and making known the culture, religion, language, and identity of the nations, nationalities, and peoples [of Ethiopia] on equal terms" ("60th Anniversary"). He further stated that that mission was not confined to the national space but that the theatre needed to "promote the expressions of identities to the world and build the positive image of the country." Yalew further elaborated the responsibilities of the theatre by appreciating the works performed there and by calling for further "heralding of the country's renaissance" which aimed at "defeating poverty." He stressed that there would be no better mechanism to realize this mission other than the arts.

Being *performative* in multiple registers, the speakers buried the look and workings of ugly neoliberal political economy deep down adopting a performative stance at multiple registers. Unlike the usual spatial management of official power, in which a leader distances himself/herself from the ordinary people mostly by using the pulpit as an altar of authority and a boundary of power, the vice minister came forward and bowed down with a sign of great respect. She cited from the cultural gestures of respecting seniors and enacted that citation on the National Theatre stage in a way that defied the normalized way of presenting oneself as an official. She uttered words like 'love,' 'knowledge,' 'hard work,' maintaining a 'cultural base' and 'elevating the arts.' We see

the tension between her ‘genuine’ respect for the artists and their profession on the one hand and the official script that she had to enact when she reiterated the state narrative of ethnicity, preservation, and advancement of cultures without accounting for the performing bodies’ subjectivities. Leaning on the podium, the Speaker of the House of Federation spoke extemporaneously as if he were improvising. Yet the audience knew that he was reading a script from his mind, for the language had already bombarded them for decades. The state officials were enacting their roles as hiders of themselves as political actors and of the ideology of the state. They re-read the script of “nations, nationalities, and peoples” and “the developmental state” almost verbatim as it is written on the Grand Transformational Program (GTP I and II). They highlighted the clichéd motifs of “image building,” “conserv[ation]” and “develop[ment]” of “cultural diversity, historical and natural heritage” as well as a continuous worldwide promotion of cultural heritage of nations, nationalities, and people (*GTP II* 60).

Yet what the officials did not talk about was how the Manichean politics of identity has been serving the interests of the few who deliberately used the historical ethnic grievances to foment animosity among various ethnic groups, particularly those who considered themselves as members of the Amharic and Oromo language speaking groups, which, according to the current Ethnic Federalism arrangement, constitute the two largest populations in the country. As has been discussed earlier, the elites of the minority Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) worked on the basis of patron-client relations so as to maintain their political and economic hegemony. Though it cried out against neoliberalism, arguing that the market does not deliver redemption, TPLF

controlled the Ethiopian local-global market. Devoid of any articulation of freedom and subjectivity that transcends primordial identity politics, the state sponsored ethnic music and dance performances participate in masking the real politics.

Unlike the stipulation in the constitution that guarantees support to the peoples in order to ensure “growth and enrichment” of cultures, the state was more interested in commodification of culture and arts (“Proclamation” 13, 33). Hence, the other thing that the officials camouflaged at the anniversary was the neoliberal logic that informed both Grand Transformation Plan I and II. According to the new plan “development of [the] agriculture sector” and “expansion of industrial development with a primary focus on light manufacturing” industry get primary attention. The goal of the Plan is to “realiz[e] the national vision of becoming a low middle-income country by 2025” and to enact what TPLF-EPRDF cadres would like to call *hidase maregaget* (ensuring Ethiopia’s Renaissance) (ix). According to the mastermind, theorist and scriptwriter of these kinds of projects, the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, every nation, nationality, and people should work “to realize the Ethiopian renaissance in all its forms poetically, economically, socially and culturally” (“Speech”).

Hence, in view of contributing to the “overall socio-economic development of the country,” the culture and tourism sector sets an objective “to improve the utilization of information resources, enhance the development of cultural industry and market networks, increase the conservation and development of cultural heritage, [and] improve the market system of [the] tourism sector” (*GTP II* 166). The term art is not mentioned in the document at all. The words theatre and cinema each appear once, when the sector

(culture and tourism) commits itself to “enhance the development of cultural industry and market linkages” (Ibid).

Complicating the idea and practice of cultural history, the march towards renaissance is set as a “historical mission” in a progressive manner. In spite of his speech that talks about the ‘regressive time’ Ethiopia experienced “at the dawn of new millennium” due to what it names “darkness of poverty and backwardness,” the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi bestowed on his party the honorable task of fighting back “in the last few years of the departing millennium” (Ibid). In the speech he gave at the Ethiopian new millennium, he said that all “nationalities, followers of all the great religions of [the] country, men and women, young and old” should “work hard” to mend the regression and “make [the] current reality a mere footnote in [the] long and glorious history” (Ibid). Despite the discourse of ‘revolutionary democratic development’ that ‘centers the poor,’ the authoritarian EPRDF, particularly TPLF and its collaborators, have blatantly monopolized the local (Ethiopian) markets as they covertly embezzled billions of dollars.²⁰ Those who protested against them paid a price facing unspeakable atrocities such as torture, confinement, and killing. It was amid this reality that performers of the National Theatre performed as *limatawi-artist* (developmental-artist) as the current political saying has it.

A Necklace as a Baton: A Dialectical Image in an ‘Ethnic’ Performance

Thinking in performing bodies, I would like to capture and read an image in a dance that was (made) one of the highlights of the 60th anniversary of the National

²⁰ For further discussion on the Ethiopian “developmental state” and the one party politico-economic domination see Abbink; Lefort “Ethiopian Economy” 357-394; “Theory and Practice” 460-470; Berhanu “Political Parties in Business” 1467-1483; Vaughan and Mesfin *Rethinking Business and Politics* 60.

Theatre. The two announcers told us that we had to pay attention to the musician and dance performance that was about to be showcased after the speeches delivered by the state officials. They said that we would see “a generational relay/transmission” in the Konso-Dirashe song.²¹ I want to first explicate the dance and an image from the dance. Here I am drawing on Walter Benjamin’s idea of ‘dialectics at a standstill’ about which he says:

It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, the image is that wherein what has been coming together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: the image is dialectics at a standstill. (*Arcades* 463)

I seize the dialectical figure of “passing a necklace as a baton” to explode the continuum entailed in the state-sponsored transmission of culture and to see the constellations around its image making. Following Benjamin who cautions us to not to participate in the victors’ procession/ritual in which the script of modernity masks its “barbarity,” I “brush history against the grain,” questioning the valorized global-local discourse of preservation and transmission of “cultural treasures,” what the Ethiopian government calls *yebahl, yetefetro ena yetarik qirs* (cultural, natural, and historical heritages) (*GTP II* 60). This is not to deny the value of culture. Instead, I seek to disentangle culture from the vicissitudes that power imposed on it. The state sucks culture out of historical material condition and reinvents it as sheer “heritage” to hide and sustain the abuse/appropriation it commits against culture and subjectivity.

²¹ Konso and Dirashe are two ethnic groups who share *borders* and live in the southwestern part of Ethiopia. The singer of this song, which consists of three chapters, hails from Dirashe.

The state reduces a dynamic culture into a static archive. Diyah Rachmi

Larasati warns us about the danger of the traditional archive in maintaining a *status quo*, erasing in particular female dancers' embodied historiography, when she says that even the dancers' repertoire, an embodied memory, and performance would be twisted into a static archive (186-195). Larasati theorizes the marginalized female performer as a "thinking body" who, in her presence in the here and now, offers a decolonizing methodology as a reminder, as a shaker of the restful archive, laying bare the barbarity of historicism. Following these ideas and building on them, I uncover suppressed memories, contradictions, and desires of female performers.

A melody surged from the right wing of the National Theatre's stage. It was a beautiful sound of the *Phila*, a musical instrument from the southern part of Ethiopia (now called the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region). All musicians of the 'traditional' music band started to play at once with full force. In the history of Ethiopian professional theatres, a group composed of indigenous musical instruments, dances, costumes, and ornaments is usually called 'traditional music troupe/unit.' The 'modern' music and dance group uses western musical instruments. Yet, a trend emerged at the National Theatre when Richard Hager, a German director, formed a 'traditional' music and dance group. Until then, the National (former Haile Selassie I) Theatre had had only 'modern' music band, theatre and film (screening) departments, the performers being cross-genre artists. The Love of the Country association/theatre had a troupe formed to perform theatre, music, and dance using indigenous musical instruments until it was fragmented through time. Hence, the "traditional/cultural" is usually anchored in the

indigenous while the “modern” is associated with Western instruments, even though both genres inhabit the same time-space and the latter uses local artistic sensibilities like music scales. Interestingly enough, the poster of the 60th anniversary of the national theatre reads: “*Ye’Ethiopiawyan Twfitawi Ye’Kine Tibebe Sifra*” (“A Space of Ethiopians’ Folkloric Arts”). This suggests that the theatre, as a federal cultural and arts institution that commits itself to the advancement of cultures of various ethnic groups, privileges and mainly performs the state’s politics of ethnicity/identity. Though multi-genre performances are staged, the main discursive frame is tuned along the national narrative of “nations, nationalities, and peoples.” And this particular Konso-Dirashe music/dance was also meant to highlight those politics.

Wearing blue ‘cultural’ dresses of the Konso ethnic group, four young men who hold spears and shields accompany the main hunter of the group who puts on a white cloth. Surrounding the hunter, they march/dance to a forest. The singer, Kusiya Tolonge enters from the right wing and takes the center stage in front of the drummer and between the *kirar* players who sit on his right and the *masinko* (single-stringed bowed lute) and *washint* (Ethiopian flute) players who are on his left. The choir, two female singers, performs the refrains standing on his right in front of the *kirar* (five or six-stringed bowl-shaped lyre) players. Rich with its melody and choral sounds, the song requires the singer, the choir and another chorus (the dancers and musicians, in this case) to perform a call and response. The young men get back from hunting – dancing – displaying their trophy. They move past from right to left and exit through the right wing. Now the women who wear pink t-shirts and grey dresses come to the stage from the left wing.

The song is dramatized in three episodes: *Yiworio* (Konso ethnic group); *Oye Oye* (Konso); *Erimosa* (Dirashe ethnic group). The first part of the song is about (going out for) hunting, the second about winning a trophy (victory in general), and the third about defiance (breaking oppressors). The male group of dancers and the pink-t-shirt-wearing females interact through dance in the course of the song. Immediately, another group of female dancers joins the rest. These women wear green t-shirts and white dresses with golden embroidery around their hips and the edges of their dresses. One can see that the pink t-shirt wearers represent the older generation while the other women in green t-shirts symbolize the younger ones.

However, for people like myself who have had the chance to work with and know these performers, it was easy to detect that the representation based on generation was fractured. In the group that denotes the older generation, two of them were hired in the mid-1960s, one in the mid-1970s, and the other in the 2000s. The latter, Firegenet Alemu, explained to me that she joined this senior group as a character because her appearance makes her older. So she acts *as if* she belongs to the older generation. The women who wear green t-shirts were all hired during the existing regime (1991-the present) while the older ones became the staff members of the theatre in 1966 when they were recruited from nightclubs and cabarets as Haile Selassie's government was rushing to take part in the first World Festival of Black Arts that Léopold Sédar Senghor choreographed in Dakar, Senegal, where Ethiopia was named a "Star Nation" of the festival.

Moving around all areas of the stage, mingling, and regrouping, all the performers dance in conversation with the musicians, the choir, and the singer. The *pink* group

comes from the right as the *green* group moves forward from the left. In between, the male performers, including the vocalist, sing, and dance standing horizontally in line occupying up-center-stage. Two performers come closer to one another, leaving their respective female groups behind. A female performer from the ‘older’ generation, Alganesh Tariku, takes out her necklace as she dances. The younger dancer, Yetnayet Laqew, eagerly and cheerfully waits to receive the necklace, moving toward the center and getting closer to her older colleague with a faster rhythm. They take the center stage and made themselves more visible. As their faces turn to the audience, Alganesh (the senior artist) bestows the necklace on Yetnayet’s neck from behind. Coming around to Yetnayet’s right side, Alganesh kisses her on her forehead. The audience whistled and shouted. The message foreshadowed by the emcees in a “relay/transmission” metaphor was heard and seen. An ethnic necklace was transmitted to the next generation as a baton.

Read against the state officials’ language that highlighted the preservation, advancement, and transmission of culture, the appearance of this performance is about performing the politics of ethnicity. Relying on the sponsorship of the state, the National Theatre uses a “romantic language” in its choreography of ethnic dances, turning the performance space in to, as Larasati notes it well, “museums” “imprisoned in the tastes of patronage” (191). Indeed, since some of the northern cultural expressions have been privileged while others were marginalized and denigrated, the cultural justice that the new ethnic federal constitution accords in principle is a political act. However, it needs to be noted first that such performances of ethnic music and dances have been staged at the National Theatre and abroad during Haile Selassie’s rule and the military rule too. This is

not to deny the fact that the intensity and overt political acts around the question of cultural justice have gained a different momentum since the coming to power of the current regime. What does it mean to stage diversity entirely based on ideas of preservation and transmission, masking what is entailed in the passing of an ethnic necklace as a baton? The relay needs to be exploded to reveal the multiple, interlocked, and fragmentary issues such as gender, sexuality, class, capital, ethnicity, race, and disability.

Let me recapture the dialectical image that was brought to my attention by two female performers: Alganesh Tariku and Yetnayet Laqew. Following the honor she received from the Ministry of Culture that gave her a special recognition at a grand ceremony during the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the National Theatre, I spoke with Alganesh not only as a researcher but also as a journalist-intellectual-performer who was interested in having conversations about the conditions of performers at the state-owned theatres. In 2015 and 2016, while I was conducting my fieldwork for my dissertation project, I resumed my journalistic show on arts and social change on FM Addis 97.1 as an independent producer and host. I raised a question to this senior artist on this radio program: Given that the younger dancers are protesting and petitioning against the state-owned theatres due to their precarious labor conditions, what does it mean to pass a necklace to the next generation as a baton?

“First of all,” Alganesh replied, “the dance in which I gave the necklace to Yetnayet was not intended to be staged this way” (“Conversation with Alganesh”).²² According to Alganesh, the Konso-Dirashe song and dance were about to be performed only by the younger dancers. The idea of passing the *baton* came from Alganesh who convinced her younger colleagues that it could be an occasion in which the past professional (artistic) efforts and overall fights of the older generation would be recognized. This unveils another layer.

Seizing the figure of the baton as, what Benjamin terms, “dialectics at a standstill,” one can see how dialectics arrives not in the sense that the contradictions have not been there always already but in the moment of the historical material method that exposes concealed confrontations. “That song and its dance are our [the older generation] history too,” Alganesh disclosed to me, “it was us who first danced it when Kusiya brought it to the National Theatre thirty-three years ago. We have many memories. We fought so many battles” (Ibid). Alganesh configured herself into the image while the Konso-Dirashe music and dance were to be reproduced just as a sign of ethnic diversity. While the choreography was about to forget a vital aspect of the past, she enacted history through re-membering herself into and with the new generation of dancers. She carried her memory/history through her body. When she came to the stage her presence re-called the works her generation did. Moreover, as Larasati would say, Alganesh’s embodied presence at the 60th anniversary of the national theatre arrived as a “reminder” that troubled the state’s version of linear history. That act is very important particularly to

²² From conversations that I had with Alganesh Tariku on the radio, Addis Zema. (“Conversation with Artist Alganesh Tariku”). I met in person and spoke with Alganesh while I was in Addis Ababa (2015-2016) and in 2018 over the phone.

female dancing bodies since it re-calls erased “memory” and “subject[ivity]” (Larasati 192).

I then posed to Alganesh a follow-up question: “What fights did you fight? What did you or did you not achieve?” She replied, “I was in the forefront with my female colleagues in the 1974 revolution when we protested against male administrators and stood up for our rights when one of our own was killed, and when many of us were beaten and arrested” (“Conversation with Alganesh”). Alganesh also told me that it was due to the long-standing fights and that particular demonstration that she and her female colleagues became permanent employees and recognized as civil servants for the first time in the history of modern performance in Ethiopia, because prior to that moment they had been marginalized as members of a caste group called *azmari* (minstrel). “It is very sad to see the younger generation suffering from similar problems after we paid the price,” Alganesh lamented “We gained even the permanent status in the civil service but that is obliterated now” (Ibid). This is just one aspect of the dialectical image, however.

When one approaches another constellation of the image, the relations become more chaotic, complicating even the idea and practice of *presence* in the here and now. Yetnayet Laqew, the younger dancer, was “extremely happy” because she “was able to get the honor to inherit the necklace” from Alganesh (She used the Amharic term *merekeb* [inherit] rather than *mekebel* [receive]) (“Conversation with Yetnayet”). She continued, “We know that the previous generations have paid prices to make our profession respectable. We have problems challenging us until now, however. It is complicated.” How? “You know,” Yetnayet took a pause and said, “For instance, I was

dismissed in less than two weeks since I was honored to receive the necklace from Alganesh.” Why? “It was Alganesh who reported to the administration that I was not a disciplined dancer” (Ibid).

This was the scenario: As almost every dancer does, due to the fact that the low income of dancers in the state theatres cannot support their lives well, Yetnayet went out of town to take part in a performance hired by private business people. Because she knew full well that her act would be consequential, she was cautious enough to get permission from her supervisor at the National Theatre. Not informed by anyone, Alganesh was furious when she could not find Yetnayet backstage for the next performance after the 60th anniversary celebration. Alganesh reported to the administration suggesting that Yetnayet should be dismissed and arguing that her act was not expected from a “disciplined professional.” On the other hand, Yetnayet remarked that Alganesh was upset because she did not want to bestow the necklace on a shorter female performer’s neck. The reason, according to Yetnayet, was that Alganesh wanted to keep the symmetry between her and her dancing partner. And it was only Yetnayet whose height would match with Alganesh’s.

Interiorizing the heteropatriarchal and the Semitic idea of beauty (light skin color, thin lip, and tall [to grace the stage with her presence]), Alganesh re-inscribed the violence committed against her and her contemporaries by male administrators since she came to the stage. Such standards of beauty were the requirements used to select a female performer to present a bucket of flowers to Emperor Haile Selassie whenever he went to the theatre. In so doing, heteropatriarchy wrote its scripts on performing bodies. Even

though the residues of such scripts have re-emerged across the decades, female performers have long fought back against those moral and embodied codes, as is evident in the discussion that will resume in the next chapter.

State-owned theatres in particular and mainstream narratives and practices in general reproduced heteropatriarchal and neoliberal relations by controlling various spaces. For example, due to such control, the state sponsored choreography of identity has not denied performers the opportunity to conduct, what Karl Marx calls, “perpetual self-criticism” that would help Alganesh and Yetnayet to build on the previous histories of resistances and forge critical solidarity (“Eighteenth Brumaire” 22). When power obliterated spaces of critical conversation, *a presence* that makes “a reminder” possible would be a moment of collision with the “spirits of the past” which arrive with all “their names, marching orders, uniforms, in order to enact new scenes” (19-20). When she unsettled the state choreography of ‘ethnic-dance’ by inserting herself into an existence different from the one sanctioned by the state-owned theatre, Alganesh insisted in bringing back her embodied historiography into the performance and created a new scene. Yet the choreography of that new scene enacted violence when it cited from a heteropatriarchal text, which was written on her body.

Fossilizing memories, flattening out social relations, stripping objects of their moments of emergence, the state makes it difficult for marginalized bodies to forge a critical alliance. Rather, it breeds another conflict among marginalized bodies. Gendered, classed, sexed and ethnicized violence are camouflaged as language and acts of freedom are made precarious. The songs and dances of various ethnic groups are displaced from

their context and the space-time of their emergence in order to serve the narrative of sheer multiculturalism. For instance, it was the Dirashe people who composed Kusiya Tolonge's song, particularly its last episode during the beginning of the 1970s when they fought for their land right, which was one of the primary questions during the 1974 revolution. What is equally interesting is the fact that at the time of the state staged performance of Konso-Dirashe dance, protesters in Konso were "already imprisoned," some inhumanely "chained" as if they were "slaves." The state also bragged about getting the Konso Cultural Landscape (with its magnificent terracing) designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site ("Konso"). It abstracts these kinds of indigenous knowledge forms and ways of life while it suppresses the demands of the people for freedom. It also uses their 'heritages' just as *matters* for the tourist market, not recognizing those heritages and the lives that created them as life worlds and as lives that *matter*.

Hence, the passing of the baton was not an act of smooth transmission. First, it hides the creation and sustenance of ethnic-based economic and political hegemony. Already erasing the freedom of thought and expression, the state used its theatres and various events including the 60th anniversary under discussion, to conceal the neo-liberal mechanism of governing subjectivities; it also used at once the bodies of artists to advance its own economic progress in the name of celebrating, preserving, and advancing cultures. From official receptions at the airport, the palace, and town halls to development sites of construction such as the Gibe and Great Renaissance Dams, from Pan-African politics that takes place in various parts of the continent to international trade fairs and exhibitions, performers – particularly dancers – are the *cultural* mediators of the business

transactions of the state. As Larasati shows us, such workings of power against dancing bodies represent “the common problem suffered by art workers whose aesthetic or artistic works are broadly received and produced, even widely disseminated,” yet already disavowed (192). This disavowal aggravates their vulnerability.

Conclusion

The Ethiopian “ethnic-federal” and “developmental” state, which promises to bring people including women out of abject poverty, participates in the marginalization of the very bodies that dance its politics of ethnicity and development. TPLF (the core party of the incumbent) established itself as the righteous heir and culmination of the 1974 revolution, albeit as the harbinger of politics of ethnicity in Ethiopia. It is through such hegemonic representation that the party has created an ethnic-developmental (local-global) structure of belonging.

This chapter has unveiled how such representation of space fictionalizes the past and closes off possibilities of multi-genre freedom in the present. Both Pan-Ethiopianist and ethnonationalist discourses of history allowed Rankean and Hegelian methodologies to ride freely making the reconstruction of the Real in the past an interiorized epistemology. Yet, as Roland Barthes reminds us the Real has never been easy to capture. The real lives beneath a crust. It bewilders us in its appearance. That is what Barthes calls the reality effect. However, historicist history writing continues to convince us that it recuperates reality as it has happened while it reduces three-dimensional embodied movement in space into a continuum of temporality. This conundrum makes the question of intelligibility essential.

Chapter One began with this discussion since how an object is invented as worthy of note or intelligible is a fundamental question because it defines what can and cannot be thought. If another articulation and embodied praxis of freedom is rendered unthinkable, what at once is obliterated is the possibility of decolonial practice. Since traditional historiography in Ethiopia still wages its relevance in the name of defying “propaganda” and commitment to “factual” reconstruction, it is imperative to argue that the question is not about denying the fact and the event as de Certeau argues. It is rather about asking a different question. How does one make an object intelligible? And how does that moment of intelligibility render another event, way of thinking, and embodied experience not just unintelligible but also unfathomable? This, in turn, begs the question of theory and methodology that unsettles the historicism embedded in uncritical history writing/historiography, thereby, deconstructing the coloniality of power.

To see those obfuscated moving bodies, Walter Benjamin would advise, a historical materialist historiographer should not believe in a restful contemplation of the past but challenge any methodology that investigates a locked time (past). This methodology wants a historical materialist to be conscious of the “constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past finds itself in precisely in this present” (“Eduard Fuchs” 227).

Historicizing the emergence of a Hegelian conception of history, this chapter has argued that it is essential to challenge also the coloniality of historiography. In this regard, the works of Oyěwùmí, Lugones, and Wynter present possibilities to see how critical decolonial embodied historiography would fundamentally challenge and change

the colonial-heteropatriarchal theoretical and methodological import that permeates the epistemic and practical aspects of history writing. Lugones critically engages with Quijano's conception of coloniality of power through a careful reading that accounts for the productive conception of coloniality of power yet critically rethinks the whole project by revealing the coloniality of gender and sexuality. She argues that Quijano's conception of gender and sexuality masks the workings of power that oppressed and disenfranchised non-Western "colonized women." Lugones shows us how a decolonial option that considers coloniality of gender should think about the multiple inferiorization that colonialism committed on many fronts and on various bodies – particularly those who were epistemologically reduced to Eurocentered categories of women, men, patriarchy, and homosexuality – to control and exploit the economic and political fields subjugating those bodies.

Wynter reminds us to always be wary of the pervasive presence of Man who appears as the universal model of being human. What concerns her is the "pure continuity between the genetically regulated modes of organic life and the always rhetoric-discursively regulated modes of the human life" which continues to "represent[t] [this] model of the human, Man" ("Beyond" 645). She then calls for a radical rethinking of the human that draws a parallel between decolonial epistemology and praxis. Given that the Hegelian conception of history hinges on the superiority of Man who excels both in time (always ahead) and place (Europe), Wynter's critique of Man is very helpful in rethinking the coloniality of historiography.

In fact, in Ethiopian studies the Hegelian view has been critiqued. However, the critique confines itself to a debunking of the Semitic thesis. The field of Ethiopian studies, however, has never seen itself as vulnerable to and as an embodiment of Hegelian historicism and colonial perception of time and space. Further, no one has studied Hegel's direct theorization of Ethiopia and his positivist methodology by relating his theorization of Ethiopia as ambivalent entity, which is, in his view, neither African nor Asian. In deconstructing a Hegelian methodology, Chapter One has analyzed two objects: the burden of history (as a discursive trope which is, in turn, discursively valorized) and a Konso-Dirashe song and dance performed at the National Theatre's 60th anniversary. Preceded by state officials' re-enactment of the mainstream narrative of ethnicity and development, the ethnic-dances that were staged under the aegis of the federal government participated in what Pedro Rocha de Oliveira theorizes as aestheticization of reality. The state uses the female performers' bodies to make its idea of ethnicity and development 'hegemonic' while it relegates their "experiencing" bodies to obscurity. This section of the chapter brings the experiencing bodies of female artists to attention in order to show how fractured and violent are the state's projects of ethnicity and development.

However, in the choreography of the Konso-Dirashe ethnic dance, a senior dancer who was invited by the National Theatre to participate in the celebratory performances of the 60th anniversary of the theatre inserted her embodied historiography into the theatre space. One layer of the constellations around the dialectical image of that dancer's passing of a necklace as a baton to a performer of a younger generation revealed that the

presence of Alganesh Tariku, made it possible for us to see fragments of the past that circulate precisely in the time-space of the 60th anniversary of the National Theatre. Alganesh re-membered herself in the time-space of the now by interrupting the sheer preservation and advancement of culture according to the state's programmatic scheme of ethnicity and development. That has allowed me to see what other experiences enter the theatre besides the repetitive performances of ethnic dances, which are uprooted from their respective social and historical spaces.

The confrontation between the senior artist and the younger performer, Yetnayet Laqew, who participated in the passing of the necklace, revealed another layer of contradiction. Alganesh as a senior performer did not like it when the younger female artist was later absent from the stage after she received the necklace from Alganesh in the previous performance. The younger performer had permission to be absent, yet Alganesh reported on her and prevailed on the administration to dismiss Yetnayet for 'lack of discipline.' The National Theatre administration had used similar logics in the 1970s to punish Alganesh and her colleagues. Clearly, the National Theatre as an institution has sustained mechanisms of regulation and management of the female body in its structure. While its mechanisms thrive, female artists from different generations quarrel.

This uncanny relation between the past and the present reveals the fact that female performers have not been allowed to share their histories of resistance and to build critical alliance. As systemic dominations continue, the violence they commit gets displaced onto the same bodies who equally suffered – across generations – from the practices of the same institution. The mis/representation of ethnicity as the sole and

urgent question to be addressed in the contemporary Ethiopian state, albeit to create a certain structure of power, is premised on erasure of other embodied experiences. The erasure is epistemic and embodied in that it first exiles the female body from theory in order to establish a heteropatriarchal structure of power. This makes it necessary to follow fragments of the past and their moments of emergence in which female bodies are constructed and deconstructed.

CHAPTER TWO

Staging Socialist *Progressive* Time:

Female Bodies' Spatial Maneuvers in Revolution

[Female artists are] engaged in and getting special income from a scandalous part-time prostitution and bar business [...] We are utterly unable to preserve and advance the country's culture and arts in the aim of *Ethiopia first* and socialist philosophy [due to your noncompliance to close your cabaret], I and the discipline committee decided to give you a three-month salary in advance and dismiss you from your employment. (Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin "Dismissal Letter")²³

[...] I started [sic] the bar business as I was on a low salary and for life became so expensive. [...] Let alone at this time of progress under the principle of *Ethiopia first*, I had been strongly defying the expansion of drinking houses even in earlier times. [...] Asking for appropriate compensation that considers my long years of service, I notify you that it's unjust for me to be dismissed with a three-month salary. (Telela Kebede "Grievance Letter")²⁴

²³ Tsegaye played various roles as a poet-playwright, theorist of Ethiopian socialism, the vice minister of ministry of culture, head of arts and theatre department and director of the Ethiopian National Theatre.

²⁴ The Ethiopian Telela had worked for the Haile Selassie (later baptized as National) theatre for nineteen years as a singer, dancer, and actor traveling in different parts of Africa, the West and the East participating in Pan-African, non-aligned movement and cold war cultural diplomacy. These are excerpts presented to prompt dialectical tensions that would unfold in many ways in this chapter.

Introduction

“It was I who created Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin,” spoke Telela Kebede, a senior female artist, about the altercation she had with a prolific playwright and theatre administrator in mid-1970s. As hyperbolic as it may seem, Telela’s expression shows how the person with whom she thought she wielded solidarity in a revolution later “turned against” her (“Conversation with Telela”). Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin wrote a dismissal letter to artist Telela on December 28, 1974, one year after the 1974 revolution overthrew Haile Selassie’s monarchy. He took his act of disciplining and punishing of the actress as a “deterrence against” the other female performers who worked for the two old state-owned theatres, namely Haile Selassie I (later baptized as the National Theatre) and Love of the Country (Patriotic) theatres (“From National Theatre to Telela 90-91”). Tsegaye accused these women of involving in “scandalous part-time prostitution” and ordered them to close their cabaret (small nightclubs) where they sing and sell alcohol (“From Telela to National Theatre”).²⁵

On March 14, 1975, artist Telela Kebede wrote back to Tsegaye *using* the revolution’s discourse of socialist progress, explicating the institutional and everyday conditions that forced her to run a cabaret, and calling the administration “unjust.” The conflict between Tsegaye and Telela, as reflected in their two letters, calls for an exploration of the strategy that power enacted, the ways in which that strategy played out on marginalized female performers’ bodies and the tactics engendered by these women. These dialectical tensions make it imperative to investigate how strategies forge

²⁵ The members present in the meeting which convened to dismiss artists Telela were: Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin (Chairperson), Hailu Gabre-Mariam, Haimanot Alemu, Mer’awi Sitot and Sirak Asfaw (members).

discourses, delineate boundaries and manage bodies in spaces. They also raise questions about the modes of operation in which tactics make use of available resources.

This chapter argues that the female performers' tactical moves reveal the possibilities, inadequacies, paradoxes, and seductiveness embedded in the invention, staging, and institutionalization of Ethiopian socialism. I ask: what desires, resiliencies, and insurgencies of the female performers were glossed over or rendered incommensurable amidst the staging of an "Ethiopian socialism" or Pan(African)humanism? What is political about the tactical moves in spaces or the spatial performance of the female performers? To approach these questions, I will look at: one, the ways in which a leading theatre maker and administrator invented the 'national theatre' as an idea and as a place, conceptualized temporality and re/organized spaces; and two, the female performers' tactics of survival in the face of various disciplinary measures and their spatial performance or struggle to change their marginal positions in the society.

Tensions between Im/Proper Socialisms: Competing Ideologies

Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin's argument that the female performers posed a challenge against Ethiopian socialist inter/national missions calls for a careful exploration of his discursive and spatial projects. I argue that these particular historical realities informed the articulation of the national theatre's local and international 'responsibilities' and the marking of the female performers' bodies as "impure" and "improper." I also hold that the ways in which the female performers engendered their insurgencies were premised on the very "socialist" project that they made use of and rallied against. These contradictions

necessitate mapping the tensions and homologies between the 1974 socialist ideologies in general and Tsegaye's staging of what he called "Ethiopian socialism" in particular.

It needs to be noted from the outset that an investigation of Tsegaye's dramatization of Ethiopian socialism cannot be fathomed without consideration of the dialectical relation within the artistic field and in the inter/national leftist articulations of freedom. The prolific poet and playwright Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin had resigned from the Haile Selassie I theatre in 1969 because he critiqued the monarchical rule through his radical plays and poetry. It was due to the performers' participation in the 1974 revolution and the particular request they presented to the state that Tsegaye became the director of the national theatre and the vice minister of the newly established Ministry of Culture in 1975. Theorizing an Ethiopian socialist project that critiques both the local monarchical rule and cultural imperialism, Tsegaye set the role of the National Theatre in an inter/national scale.

For instance, he opened his letter of dismissal to Telela this way: "The responsibility of the Ethiopian [Socialist] National Theatre in a local and global space is to celebrate all the nation's arts and let them be celebrated as it gets itself known through letting the arts be known." First, Tsegaye delineated the missions of the national theatre along the imaginary of the socialist "nation" at local and global levels. On the one hand, he allowed performers to participate in revolutionary plays written by a person who has "mature artistic sensibility." Tsegaye staged plays like *Ha Hu (ABC)* and *Mother Courage* that revolutionized the history of spectatorship in the country. When *ABC* was

staged, a firefighter brigade had to disperse thousands of audiences using water canon because they were forcefully breaking into the theatre. On the other hand, as is evident in his letter to Telela, Tsegaye then marked the female performers' bodies and their cabaret business as a national scandal. He wrote: "We are utterly unable to preserve and advance the country's culture and arts in the aim of *Ethiopia first* and socialist philosophy [due to the female performers' non-compliance to close their cabarets]." Tsegaye used his act of "dismiss[ing]" Telela as a "deterrence" against the other female performers. He also made sure that the administrations at the Ministry of Culture, the National and Love of the Country (Patriotic) theatres held the female performers responsible for the hindrance of the socialist cultural missions.

How did then Tsegaye create and/or hinder possibilities through the staging of his Ethiopian socialism? How did that play out on the performers' bodies that "created" the condition for, make use of and/or fight against Tsegaye's artistic and political intervention? The subsequent parts of this chapter attempt to understand the complex and paradoxical relations by way of speaking to these overarching questions.

An Ethiopian Socialism: Rethinking Universal Reason and History

Ethiopian socialisms were heterogeneous and conflicting nay uncannily similar. The category that some civilian and military leftists knew as "Ethiopian socialism" was different from another classification of a Marxist ideology known as "scientific socialism." There were still people who argued that both were similar in that Marxism guided them through (Haile-Iyesus 6). I am interested here in understanding how a particular articulation of 'Ethiopian socialism' produced its own discourse and

subjectivities as it spoke to other Marxian ideologies and “ethnocentric”

[Eurocentric] Universalism.²⁶ While it attends to the contradiction and struggle between various leftist groups, my discussion mainly focuses on the confrontation between what some civilian leftists call “scientific socialism” and what has been known in Ethiopian history as “Ethiopian socialism” by later focusing more on Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin’s staging of his *hibretesebawinet* or Ethiopian socialism.

Un/Scientificity: *Ethiopian Socialism Vs. Scientific Socialism*

The historical categories that we see in Ethiopia as ‘Ethiopian socialism’ and Marxist-Leninist ideology /“scientific socialism” were different discursive battlefields where various ‘revolutionary’ forces confronted each other in their bid for state power. The notion of “Ethiopian socialism” gained an official status when the Provisional Military Administrative Council declared it as the government ideology on December 20, 1974. The Marxist-Leninist critique of “Ethiopian socialism” that came from the civilian left groups like EPRP (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party) and Mei’son (Amharic acronym for All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement) was a reaction to the Military’s declaration of that specific ideology. Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin and some independent intellectuals presented the ideas of “Ethiopian socialism” to the Military Council in particular and to the people at large using various occasions and stages. However, the discourse of Ethiopian socialism at large and Tsegaye’s articulation of “Ethiopian socialism” have been consigned to anecdotal account. The mis/representation of the past

²⁶ Tsegaye identified the leaders of the leftist student movements, particularly those who came from the student associations found in North America and Europe as “ethnocentric [Eurocentric]” in most of his writings, be it in his theoretical essays or creative literature and performance.

along the binary of ethnicity/class questions pushes female performers' participation in and resistance against "Ethiopian socialism" further into obscurity.

Hence, other important lived experiences and articulations of desires turn to be at best undependable and at worst unthinkable. For instance, Andargachew Assegid, a politician who had a prominent position in one of the popular political parties, Mei'son that forged temporary alliance with the *Derg*, could only remember that "it is not known who conceptualized and outlined the [ideological] line called "[Ethiopian] Socialism" (197).²⁷ According to Andargachew, rumor had it that the "father of African socialism President Julius Nyerere was mainly responsible for the adoption of Ethiopian socialism" (Ibid). During that time period, the story goes on, Nyerere had a transit in Addis Ababa and advised the leaders of the *Derg* to follow the African variant when they mentioned to him that they were intending to espouse socialism. Andargachew also mentions that the person who played a major role in advancing this concept in Ethiopia was Ayalew Mandefro who also proposed the "National Development Campaign" in which around 60,000 students and teachers crusaded against 'backwardness and ignorance' to 'spread knowledge' in the 'countryside' (Andargachew T. 102). It has also been said that *Lij* Michael Emiru (a progressive from the aristocrat family), Tekalign Gedamu, Nigussie Ayele and Mesfin Wolde Mariam took part in the process.

In 2014, Fikre Selassie Wegderes, one of the leaders of the *Derg* who later served as a Prime Minister, wrote that "Ethiopian socialism" came up as a response to the university students' dispatch sent to the Provisional Military Administration Council

²⁷ Andargachew Assegid's book, *Be'Achir Yeteqeche Rezim Guzo* (An Abortive Long Journey) came out in 2000.

(159). In November 1974, the students at Addis Ababa University passed a strong resolution that they “would not participate in the National Development Campaign unless the Ethiopian government’s political economy adopted socialism as its ideology” (Ibid). Then The Military Council formed a committee under the leadership of *Lij* Michael Emiru including members like Getachew Kibret (Justice Minister). The committee invited a “number of intellectuals who worked day and night to come up with its study” which was “akin to Tanzanian [or] an African socialism” (Ibid). While these developments had happened since November 1974 (when the students demanded adoption of socialism as a state ideology), Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin already wrote his play *ABC*, what one could term an “Ethiopian socialist” drama in February 1974. The play was on the National Theatre’s stage since July 11, 1974, and higher officials of the Military Council, including the rising dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam saw *ABC* at the National Theatre. In less than two months after the proclamation of “Ethiopian Socialism,” Tsegaye was invited to speak about the concept of “Ethiopian socialism” in a conference organized by the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration on January 19, 1975. He also staged his second play, *Enat Alem Tenu* (*Mother Courage*), an adaptation of Bertolt Brech’s *Mother Courage and Her Children*, accentuating his idea of Ethiopian socialism. The leaders of the *Derg* saw *Enat Alem Tenu* too. Yet neither Tsegaye’s “Ethiopian socialism” nor his contradictions with the female artists received the attention they deserved.

Given that Marxist-Leninist “scientific socialism” and “Ethiopian socialism” emerged in the very historical material confrontations between different political groups

and individuals, it is important to bring the tensions into focus as praxis than as a sheer theoretical exercise. EPRP and Mei'son accentuated their ideological positions of "scientific socialism" in their reaction to the Military Council's declaration of "Ethiopian socialism." However, mention needs to be made of the fact that Mei'son used the declaration of Ethiopian Socialism to get closer and later temporarily collaborated with the *Derg* on the basis of what it called "critical support" whereas EPRP continued to advocate for the immediate establishment of the "People's Government." It should also be noted that Tsegaye's vision of Ethiopian socialism concurs with yet it is different from the Military Council's version of Ethiopian socialism. I will first discuss the Military Council's program, the leftist political parties' reaction to the *Derg*'s manifesto and then Tsegaye's version of Ethiopian socialism to put the confrontations in perspective. Then I will show how these tensions played out on the Ethiopian female performers' bodies and the ways in which women artists traversed in these social spaces.

The main statements in the Military Council's "Ethiopian socialism" that provoked EPRP and Mei'son to invoke "scientific socialism" are the following:

The political philosophy should emanate from Ethiopia's soil, its people's culture, and the desires of the mass but should not be brought from a foreign country as a luxury good. ... Ethiopian socialism is the political philosophy that stems from our great religions that teach the equality of human beings, from our lived experiences and shared cultures, and from

our history signifies the sacrifices we have made. (“Ethiopian Socialism Declared”)²⁸

The declaration also stated that Ethiopian socialism was against Imperialism, feudal and capitalist greed while it denounced any discrimination based on sex, religion, and ethnicity. It espoused self-administration, advancement of languages (“the main ones”), promotion of unity among different ethnic groups to advance the already existing shared experiences and cultures under the umbrella of “love and cooperation.” It also called for East African alliance with progressive countries that believed in social justice. In spite of the fact that there were some members of the Military Council who read Marxist-Leninist discourses (unlike the usual denigration that usually comes from the Civilian Leftist groups), it was true that majority of them were not versed with the leftist literature and one of the leaders (Mengistu Haile Mariam) had to explain to them in languages they would understand (Andargachew A. 198; Fikre Selassie 159). Among the three chairpersons (two being vice primary chairpersons), Mengistu Haile Mariam (vice primary chairperson who was wielding power to kill the rest of the chairpersons and many more), told the members of the Military Council: “Ethiopian socialism means Ethiopia first. Socialism will change the life of the poor. It will help equality to prevail. It will bring about prosperity in short time. It will help our country to break with poverty. There will not be any oppression and corruption. Hunger and bareness will be eradicated” (Fikre Selassie 159-160).

Because the Military was already on power enacting what many call the “creeping coup,” some segment in the leadership of the *Derg* was inventing itself as a formidable

²⁸ See also *Ethiopian Herald* issues of December 21 and 28, 1974.

force. Adopting socialism was vital for the *Derg* leadership since many were shocked when the military killed sixty higher officials of Haile Selassie on 23 November 1974, the date marked as the *Massacre of the Sixty* and *Black Saturday*. Besides, mobilization of thousands of students and teachers in the National Development Campaign would not have been possible since the students put forth adoption socialism as a condition. Hence the *Derg* declared Ethiopian socialism on December 20 and organized a huge inauguration for the National Development Campaign at the wide-open field known as *Jan Meda* (The Emperor's Field). The three chairpersons paraded together for the first time since they came to power waving their hands to thousands of students, teachers, and soldiers who would be dispatched to different parts of the country. Notwithstanding some protests against the Campaign, the spectacle at *Jan Meda* confirmed to the *Derg* that it was regaining legitimacy and rallied the youth from the student movements, which posed challenges against the *Derg* since it came to power.

Hence, the two leftist political parties, EPRP (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party) and Mei'son (All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement - AESM), which already launched their organs *Democracia* and *Voice of the Broad Masses* respectively, immediately attacked the *Derg*'s Ethiopian socialism producing two reasons. EPRP considered the *Derg* as a usurper of power since the initial mission of the Military Council was to detain Haile Selassie's officials who would create any hurdle against the newly elected Endalkachew's Cabinet. The civilian leftist groups, particularly those who grew out of the student movements did not only despise the soldiers as "ignorant" but also as "fascists" who were ready to kill than to abdicate power. Hence, most of the civilian

leftist groups asked the military to get back to its barracks and let the people establish their government. Yet, even though the idea of “the people’s government” seems to be advanced by all groups, each party assumed that it had a theoretical and organizational competency to assume power and to be the authentic vanguard. Though, it was just the beginning of the whole conflict that would culminate in bloodshed, the altercation between EPRP and Meï’son on the one hand and the Military Council and supporters of “Ethiopian socialism” on the other needs to be situated in this bigger social space.

In an eight-page article that was published on December 25, 1974, in *Democracia*, EPRP attacked Ethiopian socialism (“What Kind” 1-8). It presented its critique around the following major points arguing that for Socialism to be realized: 1) Any understanding and action should be based on scientific analysis that considers the objective reality to give an objective solution. It does not conceal but analyze the contradictions that exist in the society according to the historical stage of a given society to offer a lasting solution, 2) The proletariat and peasantry must capture the state power and lead the government for the benefit of these classes, 3) The system of domination needs to be destroyed and means of productions owned by either imperialists or the national bourgeoisie like industry, land, and others belong to the oppressed classes, 4) The rights of each nation and people should be respected under a proletariat’s unity, 5) The state and religion should be separated, 6) Gender equality needs to be in place.

Likewise, Meï’son used its organ, *Voice of the Broad Masses* to publish its critique of “Ethiopian socialism” (Andargachew A. 200-208). Its argument revolved around four major points: 1) Ethiopia’s historical stage (semi-feudal and semi-capitalist)

does not permit her to be socialist but to consider National Democracy in which all oppressed classes come together to wage struggle against Imperialism (through national struggle) and feudalism (through democratic struggle) under the leadership of the proletariat, 2) Democratic rights should be protected since the old system continued and progressive activists are still in jail, freedom of expression should be guaranteed without any restriction, 3) The Eritrean question and issue of nations and nationalities should be approached in a way that self-determination up to secession is guaranteed even though unity would help Eritreans to grow, 4) There should not be one political organization as it is suggested by the Military Council but a consortium of various political groups in which they would organize and enlighten the people.

Both EPRP and Meï'son acknowledged, in a very cautious way, that the Military Council at least started to embrace socialism. Articulating Ethiopian experience in light of linear stages of society (Orthodox Marxian) and national revolutionary democracy (Mao and Lenin), both parties posited that oppressed classes who lived in a society that did not reach a capitalist stage and who lived under the colonial and imperialist duress needed to forge an alliance. In so doing, both called for the unity of the oppressed classes under the leadership of the proletariat. This is what they basically term “scientific analysis.” In fact, their specific claim of universality and methodology are also important to note.

For instance, because ‘Ethiopian socialism’ holds that “ideology needs to be born from the culture and soil of a country,” EPRP’s paper argues: “Science could come from abroad. We receive and use it, as it is the wealth of all human beings. [...] Political

philosophy is based on social science [methodology]. Our questions should try to understand whether it reflects the challenges of the society [and] if it gives a truthful solution based on an objective reality? ” (“What Kind”). In its earlier phase of struggle, Mei’son also critiqued the idea of Ethiopian socialism in a similar way. Mei’son’s organ *Voices of Broad Masses* writes: “[T]here could not be Ethiopian electricity, Somali electricity etc. since the fundamental law of electricity everywhere was the same. By the same token, [...] socialism could only be the same everywhere” (Andargachew T. 87).

Hence, the concerted struggle against imperialism and feudalism under the leadership of the proletariat, understanding of dialectical change as successive evolutionary stages, universality of science and the need for social science methodology/objective reading to understand contradictions in a society and to bring about solution, the self-determination of nations and nationalities including secession, gender equality that takes the class question as the major one, equality of religions, and separation of church and state are the main tenets that constituted EPRP’s and Mei’son’s conception of scientific socialism.

However, the cleavages between the civilian leftist political groups started to widen when the *Derg* soon started to take radical measures such as nationalization of banks, insurance companies, factories including rural land which also addressed to certain degree the ethnic inequality because the nineteenth century Menelikean conquest installed settlers from certain ethnic groups particularly in the southern, western, and eastern parts of the country. Commending the changes and pushing to open up more space, Mei’son collaborated with the *Derg* with its idea of “critical support.” EPRP

labeled Mei'son as a "sell-out" for "collaborating with fascist soldiers" (Kiflu). Even though both had advocated for "provisional people's government," EPRP pressed hard in that line while Mei'son worked with other political groups including the *Derg* towards awakening and organizing the people (Andargachew A).²⁹

Tsegaye's idea of "Ethiopian socialism" needs to be carefully engaged since it differs in many ways from what the *Derg* espoused as it concurs with it in many ways. It should also be noted that Tsegaye's conception shares some ideas with the other civilian leftist political groups (EPRP and Mei'son) as much as there are fundamental differences between them.

For example, Tsegaye did not entirely endorse both the Military's leadership and participation of bourgeois figures like *Lij* Michael Emiru in the revolution. Interestingly enough, Tsegaye used his plays to theorize and to speak to those problems. When *Lij* Michael Emiru went to the National Theatre to watch *Ha Hu*, Tsegaye wrote additional lines for an actor in order to critique the bourgeoisie elite (though many identified *Lij* Michael as progressive). The character, Dera lashes Semu, the mentally ill teacher in a sarcastic tone for trying to awaken the people through education (ABCD) while he could not heal himself. Dera says:

Not you, who shout ABCD,

He becomes our last resort instead.

²⁹ Once they became sworn enemies, the civilian leftist groups fought to the death and the military particularly the newly emerged party Sadat (The Flame) made use of their rivalry as the civilian parties used it to advance their causes. Eventually, Sadat particularly its leader Mengistu Haile Mariam jailed, tortured, killed, and eradicated all to rule the country until 1991. Yet, fragments of the 1974 revolution scattered in spaces to exert force against the Military regime. TPLF was one of them that toppled the Military in May 1991 through guerilla war while EPLF became successful to secede Eritrea after thirty years of fight against the Ethiopian state.

Like his father, his grandfather
 Descendant of the aristocrat
 It is him who place on us the burden
 It is him who would put the yoke down
 You confuse us with your ABCD
 But we know his lordship is the redemption.
 As if we've no one to turn to, like an orphan
 We are back in the aristocrats' arms again. (*Ha Hu* 60)

Acting as if he addresses Semu, Dera speaks to Haile Selassie's bourgeoisie elites. Through that improvisation, Tsegaye showed how the elites of the ancient regime still clung on to power. In so doing, he was calling for a systemic change that needed neither the soldiers nor the civilian educated political leaders. Tsegaye used his plays, essays, poetry and his leadership in the Ministry of Culture to advance his version of Ethiopian socialism through critical participation in the Ministry of Culture and the National Theatre under the *Derg*.

On the other hand, EPRP critiqued Tsegaye's staging of Ethiopian socialism for not bringing the proletariat as a protagonist. In the following excerpt from Tsegaye's interview with *Goh*, one of EPRP's publications, a journalist asked him: "[If you say that it is the people who are the owners of their politics, economy, and art in a socialist philosophy], from which class should the characters come to represent the people?" Tsegaye replied, "like politics and economics, art does not leave out a class while it analyzes the other one. It lets all the classes' fight be seen. Since art translates life, it

brings characters to the stage from every class. Yet it makes sure that it exposes the struggle” (“Interview with Tsegaye”). This tense interview took place after Tsegaye staged *Mother Courage* and the magazine’s questions show how the “historical stage” in which the Ethiopian people found themselves needed a theatrical production that should bring the proletariat and peasantry on to the stage. The subsequent attacks by other writers in the same magazine showed how Marxist-Leninist politicians did not welcome Tsegaye’s plays as “socialist” arts.

Hence, one of the major differences between Tsegaye’s Ethiopian socialism and the civilian leftist idea of scientific socialism is the question of class and vanguardism in which the proletariat is conceived as the conscious revolutionary who would awaken and lead the other classes. Tsegaye’s aesthetics is entangled with his politics in a sense that his art is interested in exposing the struggle and let the audience/people see their errors and strength so that they would decide for themselves. He argued that if politics would fail the people when it attempts to “speak for” the people, art should not take awakening the people as its mission. In his view, the people have already awakened themselves through lived experience and should continue to do so through critical examination (28).

The second point in which Tsegaye differs from the civilian leftists is that the idea of scientific reasoning. Whereas EPRP and Meï’son believed that social science research or positivist reasoning was the “truthful” methodology, Tsegaye critiqued Eurocentric reasoning. Semu, his character in *ABC*, says that he is not certain about things and he wonders how could the western educated Tidu be always certain about everything. Tsegaye also argues that Europe’s reason already died when Nazi Germany killed

millions of Jews and Russians. And he says, “this is the generation where reason is dead” in which the “neutron bomb is even called ‘humane’ because it is said, it does not damage the environment and affords humanity a ‘clean death’” (“World Dimensions” 16). Tsegaye does not deny science *per se*, hence, EPRP’s and Mei’son’s critique of Ethiopian socialism does not speak to his position. The reason why he advocated for the development of Ethiopian archeological department at the Ministry of Culture was also to advance scientific archeological research, which he thought as an important project to win the battle of symbolisms in the age of cultural imperialism. One of his research interests was Black Egypt, which allowed him to think through questions of Western appropriation of non-western symbols and the attendant denigration. He writes: “attacks on symbols are cultural conflict; usurpation of symbols is cultural compromise and the destruction of symbols is cultural confluence” (Ibid).

For Tsegaye, Ethiopia’s understanding of its past, its blackness was not just a fight against the artificial division created amongst ethnic groups in Ethiopia, it was also a critique of local denigration of people with darker skin color (“Hibrete’seb’awinet”). More important, it is was a Pan-African call to see how neo-colonialism, global capitalism and “*apartheid*” (in which he suggested both the South African and global racial segregations) that Ethiopia shared with the rest of Africa. While these are the questions that informed his theorization and his artistic and administrative practices, how would these speak to the female performers’ bodies at the National and the Love of the Country theatres whom Tsegaye marked as impure bodies along with Haile Selassie’s past? In order to explore this, understanding Tsegaye’s idea of humanism is vital.

Like the Military Council's articulation, for Tsegaye, *hibretesebawinet* translates as an Ethiopian variant of *socialism*. In Amharic, *hibret* means unity and *seb'awinet* translates as human-ness and/or humanity/ism. Yet, Tsegaye thinks that his ancestors' reasoning and understanding of humanity is premised on respecting difference, self-reflexivity, and open-ended relations. It is neither a self-contained Cartesian subject nor a Hegelian dichotomized and artificially bounded self and other. In this regard, his conception of relationality is akin to Senghorian seriality in which all selves are others. Hence, it is important to see the ways in which he thinks with and through Senghorian *Négritude* and pan-humanism ("Négritude"; *Ha Hu*; "Hibrete'seb'awinet").

Tsegaye's *Négritude*: Reclaiming Blackness, Unsettling Ethiopian Exceptionalism

Senghor and Tsegaye met after a French translation of Tsegaye's poem, *Senegal*, which he wrote while visiting Goree Island, appeared on a daily newspaper to accidentally arrest Senghor's attention. Despite Ethiopia's prominent role in promoting Pan-Africanism and in founding the Organization for African Unity, the Ethiopian state could only reply lately to the invitation of the First Black Arts Festival that Senghor's Senegal was about to host. After the public, particularly the university community took notice of the situation and protested against the Ethiopian state's indifference to this Pan-African artistic event, Tsegaye, and a Polish Ethiopianist, Stanislaw Chojnacki went to Senegal as Ethiopia's delegation to appeal to the Senegalese state that Ethiopia, the 'beacon of African independence,' should not be left out. His poetry is the cause for their personal acquaintance. It was then that Tsegaye met with Senghor. In fact, Senghor had read Tsegaye in *Présence Africaine* as Tsegaye knew Senghor through his works. That

meeting bore fruit when Senghor facilitated Tsegaye's travel to Paris where he was able to talk to Aliane Diop, the Black Arts Festival president and the editor of *Présence Africaine* to which Tsegaye contributed his poems and essays. Ethiopia made it to the festival and Tsegaye and Senghor continued to collaborate on theatrical productions

When Senghor and Tsegaye first met in 1966, *negritude* was one of the subjects they discussed. Fasil Yirbarek writes this in the biography of Tsegaye:

“Vouz-ete bien, Monsieur le Poete?” the president greeted [Tsegaye] when they met. They conversed cheerfully, the eloquence of their thoughts surmounting the yawning chasm between their mastery of language. Tsegaye brought up a subject dear to Senghor's heart, *negritude*, and avidly absorbed its philosophy the tenets and directions of the movement, from the lips of the architect himself. (Fasil 151-151)

Indeed, Tsegaye's thinking about Ethiopian socialism was highly informed by a Senghorian understanding of difference as the latter articulated it in his philosophy of *negritude*. Yet, Tsegaye did not just absorb *negritude*. He rather thought with and against it. In one of his essays, Tsegaye argues:

[Writers from ex-British and French colonies should be attentive to African] sensibilities which are at the core of her identity and are at the same time both age-bound and current; current because her die-hard sensibilities are still challenged and influenced by East-West values; age-bound because these sensibilities which we treasure have their own established governing values and should awaken into transitional context

by her own right and not by being bogged down into these threatening forces of doubtful motives. (Tsegaye “Literature” 63-67)

In other words, Tsegaye is insisting on writing using African languages for African publics since the imperialist alienation continued and all African cultures have not been obliterated. Notwithstanding his reification of Ethiopian script/text and the exceptionalism thereof, Tsegaye was aware that there were changes that shocked Africa to the core and interacting with the rest of the world was important too (no one translated many works of Shakespeare into Amharic than Tsegaye in Ethiopia). Tsegaye discussed with Senghor about the importance of revitalizing and using African languages using his usual interest in etymologies as one entry point. He told Senghor that the term *sew* has the same meaning in Wolof and in Amharic. It means ‘human.’ Tsegaye mentioned that his close relationship with Senghor was not welcomed by some people. He said: “Incidentally, some hard-line Francophones and narrow colonial minded French ‘thinkers’ still resent my line of thought and undermine my public existence, suspecting that I might perhaps have had minor influences over Senghor’s courageous decision to change Senegal’s national language from French to Wolof” (Teklu “Laureate” 14).

Although such critical exchanges of ideas took place between African thinkers on the concept and practice of blackness, culture, and imperialism, critiques of *Negritude* assumed the concepts as static and they fix them in place and time as if the concepts have not been traveling around. Given that Senghor’s *Negritude* has been highly critiqued as essentialist and racist, it may seem that Tsegaye’s version of *Negritude* should be

critiqued for the same reason.³⁰ That would simply be futile for two reasons. First, some postcolonial scholars did not see what intuition, epistemological and political conditions informed Senghor's philosophy and how his self-reflexive moves informed the dynamics of his theory.³¹ Second, the disavowal of *Negritude* as racist and static would not allow us to see the continental conversations and Tsegaye's engagement with Senghorian *Negritude* and his particular understanding of difference.³²

Senghor theorized the encounter with the other using the dancing body as a way of knowing. In this regard, Francesca Castaldi's discussion of *Negritude* is worthy of note. Castaldi took Senghor's *Negritude* very seriously and engaged with it when she particularly dealt with "African Dance, Africanist Discourse, and *Negritude*." By closely reading his philosophy of *Negritude*, Castaldi shows how Senghor "conceived dancing subject as the knowing subject par excellence and of dance as the very modality of being and knowing of the Negro-African" (17-33). However, Castaldi posited Senghor's *Negritude* as only the negation of colonial epistemology. After such a critique, Castaldi situates her research in postcolonial ideas of heterogeneity and syncretism. And one would ask, was that not part of Senghor's project in spite of the paradoxes and slippages that we read in his *Negritude*?

³⁰ This critique is so pervasive it has even become a 'normalcy' to see Senghor in that light. For a range of similar reflections on Senghor, see Mudimbe; Said; Bhabha. This line of thinking permeates into a field of performance/dance studies through various writings such as Francesca Castaldi's *Choreographies of African Identities*.

³¹ For literature that is shading new lights on Senghor's philosophy of *Negritude*, see Gary; Tageldin "The Place of Africa" 302-323; Diagne; Echeruo; Hymans.

³² This is not an attempt to recuperate Senghor's *Negritude*, which was not static and it had its own flaws and generative ideas. This is an attempt to push against simplifications that would not help us to do a critical analysis on what made various *negritudes* possible and what did they do.

Senghor's thinking unsettled the Cartesian way of knowing that insisted not on the thinking-feeling human who is related to the other but on the self-sufficient human mind and geometry. Senghor writes: "'I think, therefore I am' Descartes writes [and] the Negro-African could say 'I feel, I dance the other, I am.' To dance is to discover and to recreate, especially when it is a dance of love" ("Negritude") Senghor was shaking the fundamental assumption of the enlightenment thinking, which was the artificial division between mind and body. Senghor's philosophical inquiry should not just be understood as a challenge to the raced and sexed colonial epistemology. It reclaims body as a thinking being. It does not just reclaim static body, though. Drawing on Bergson, Senghor's *Negritude* reclaims a *rhythmic body* that moves in "symmetry and asymmetry, repetition or opposition" (Ibid).

When he disavowed European "reasoning eye" and embraced an African "reasoning-embrace"/ "reason of the touch," Senghor was not creating a dichotomy or collapsing 'reasoning' at all, nor was he just proclaiming existence as a black body through ontology. He was recreating a generative relationality or acknowledging difference through embodied relation or through "feel[ing], danc[ing] the other." His *Negritude* attempted to envision a different kind of universal history where particularities, heterogeneous affects, bodies, and minds move respectfully through *mestizaje*. Unlike Castaldi's claim that Senghor was still entrapped by the liberal notion of universality, he was rethinking universal history by challenging the universalization of the self-contained and the rigidly dichotomized Western modern subject. Michael Echeruo captures Senghor's rethinking of alterity: "[A] European concept of 'difference' rooted in the idea

of the absolute ‘Other’ is, in Senghor's text, replaced with a different concept of difference based on a necessary seriality of identities. Because there is ONE, there is ANOTHER; hence OTHERS. The UNIVERSAL is ALL” (2).

This Senghorian understanding of difference is key in Tsegaye’s conception of Ethiopian socialism and national theatre. Like Senghor, Tsegaye takes the encounter with the other as a nurturing moment by taking its historical material condition into consideration. Tsegaye, like Senghor, calls for a “new humanism in the twentieth century,” with new economic and cultural order since Europe’s duality or artificial binary between spirit and matter, space and time disallowed mobility of bodies in space-time (“Negritude” 30, 32; “Hibrete’seb’awinet” 18). Tsegaye’s characters in both *Ha Hu* and *Mother Courage* move in these kinds of open-ended spatial relations.

In his play, *Mother Courage*, the character Dambel invokes an old episteme about relationality. He says: “a human being searches for himself in another human being. He would understand the insufficiency on his part, his personality and being human when he gets closer and understands the other’s insufficiency, personality and being.” Relationality is important in Tsegaye’s thinking. One does not define himself against the other but through the other human being. It is not the so-called objective distance that marks this relation but closer examination. Instead of proclaiming adequacy, Tsegaye shows how the relation is punctured by mutual insufficiency. This does not just imply the critical engagement embedded in this relationship but also suggests deferral, thereby, an open-ended and continual act of knowing/examining oneself, the other, one another, and others.

Informed by this understanding of embodied relations, Tsegaye's articulation of *hibrete-seb'awinet*, meaning union/unity of humanity (socialism), arrives as an act of acknowledging difference in a particular language/locale that would extend itself to the others through what he calls *admas aqef* (horizons of horizons) suggesting crossing any boundary that divides time-spaces to rethink humanity in terms of the relation with man, nature, and cosmos ("Hibrete'seb'awinet"; "World Dimension"). Here it is important to quote Tsegaye at length:

An individual's identity is his language. Since his language is his personality and his body, if a person is robbed of his language he feels that he is defiled in the midst of his people; the fact that his identity is made impure urges him to feel he is impure and vulnerable. [...] When he is obliged to hang on his body somebody else's name he develops self-denigration and self-hatred. Due to this reality, his humanity embodies retaliation. A person embodies vengeance would not be a healthy human being.

On the other hand, language is a window of our life through which we attentively look at and analyze the world. The window would be narrow or wide. To close the window is to blind oneself. To widen the window, to multiply the windows is [sic] to open one's horizon of thinking, to spread universal lines. For a nation, being the owner of the source of different languages would mean being endowed with different music, painting, crafts, songs and dances of [various] parts of a country, proverbs and tales.

And its analytic window, with which it analyzes or translates the world in general, would extend itself to great extent, with universal breadth. [...] Its general culture is its humanity's, its personality's (life) experience. It can then be said that its experience would go beyond itself and lay down a base for universal humanity. [...] Hence, a citizen, whose analytic window has extended with such universality, his mind would be freed from the spiritual sickness of holding one language, ethnicity or religion as superior so that his humanity would embody a national reality/truthfulness.

(“Hibrete’s eb’awinet” 17)

Tsegaye begins his theorization from a particular person. Yet, that person is not isolated but an embodiment of language as he embodies language, hence, the stress on the social relations. Tsegaye depicts these kinds of characters in many of his plays. *Gerafiw Gebreyes* (Gebreyes *the Flagellator*) is among the ones who stand out in embodying self-denigration, thereby, vengeance. In *Mother Courage*, Gebryes speaks with Dambel (who fought against the Italians but imprisoned by Haile Selassie in the wake of liberation for his protest against the state):

Weyto! Weyto, an ethnic Weyto! I’m a miserable poor who whips the miserable poor. Do you know what Weyto is? It is a race. A human race. A northerner. A craftsman. An artisan. Miserable poor. They say that I was Ethiopian, a race of this soil before Saba came, before she reigned. And say, I have seen this person; a person who doesn’t deny his words, a man who doesn’t betray his race, a miserable poor who whips the poor (he

beats his chest). Say, I've seen this person. You see, freedom-fighter Dambel, you and I are the same. A whip lashes your back as discourse whips my name. They would hang you tomorrow to take your life. A culture already killed my dignity. Your misery, your prison is gigantic; my misery, my prison is cryptic. Yet, both of us are prisoners. (*Ha Hu* 85)

Speaking at once to the issue of the Semitic thesis, which asserts the foreignness of some northern Ethiopians and their civilizations, and to the question of cultural denigration, Tsegaye fleshes out the idea of incarceration of the flesh by different means. Tsegaye throws into a relief the discursive/embodied binary by entangling the question of language, discourse, and power as an embodied experience. To show how self-hatred results in further violence, Tsegaye shows in *Mother Courage* when Gebreyes rapes Tenu in front of her children. Tenu is depicted as the most severely wounded body who is attacked even by the marginalized masculinity. Yet, given that Tsegaye uses Tenu to symbolize Ethiopia in general, the female body is also deployed as an embodiment of the nation than a mundane lived experience of a female person whose social nuances are clearly articulated. We will discuss how such kind of synecdochization plays out on female bodies. Tsegaye brings this story/theorization of the self-denigrating experience of Gebreyes in order to show that the nation should heal the bodies it incarcerated. Hence, his articulation of self is aligned with the social space both in terms of alienation and remembering the dis-membered bodies, to use Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's terms ("Torn").

Yet, Tsegaye's vision of being a human is extended at planetary level through multiple windows that would let him understand his own historicity as his presence in

relation to others would let them rethink their own humanity. As Echeruo notes it in his engagement with Senghorian subjectivity, Tsegaye's conception of the human is also a critique of Eurocentric view on the self/other dichotomy, which is "rooted in the idea of the absolute 'Other.'" Tsegaye's idea of the universal is pretty much Senghorian in which difference is conceptualized "based on a necessary seriality of identities," that does not relate Self with the Other but one with another, thereby, one with others. Therefore, in this conception, all have possibilities to be the universal (Echeruo 2).

In terms of praxis, at one level, Tsegaye used such conception of subjectivity to critique black "Eurocentric" elites for disavowing their indigenous languages (knowledge systems). On another level, he unsettled the Ethiopian discourse of Solomonic dynasty that gave certain ethnic and religious group/s a privilege, with a mythology of "Sabeian ancestry," to claim uniqueness with its 'foreign' origin as well as superiority over other ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in Ethiopia.³³ In his insistence on the blackness of Ethiopia's civilization, Tsegaye was pushing against the danger of the Semitic thesis that "Caucasianized" Ethiopia's "ancient civilization" and mundane everyday life experience. Hence, Tsegaye's *Négritude* was not sheer nostalgia for the past but an act of reshaping his present and warning his 'people' particularly certain groups of the student movements who were advancing the question of secession to be wary of identity politics without losing sight of the ethnic domination happened in Ethiopia.³⁴

³³ These are the ruling elites from northern Ethiopia who shared Orthodox Christianity as religion and the *Ge'ez* script as cultural-cum-religious heritage. This dynasty claimed that its first king, Menyelek I was born from Queen Sheba of ancient Ethiopia and King Solomon of Israel. And Sabeian civilization was said to arrive from South Arabia. This is recently critiqued by writers like Teshale ("Anomaly" 414-430). Tsegaye critiqued this perspective through his poetry, plays, and essays since the 1960s.

³⁴ It was a call to be cautious about a looming 'genocide.' That is what happened in Rwanda due to the Hamitic thesis in just two decades after Tsegaye 'warned us.' It is still looming not just over the Ethiopian

Pan-African Renaissance: Building on and Departing from the Past

To stage his ideas of Ethiopian socialism, Tsegaye used his plays *ABC*, *The faces of a Skeleton* (short plays in one banner), and *Mother Courage* (adaptation from Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*).³⁵ To wit, using the opening alphabets of the Ge'ez script,³⁶ *Ha Hu* (*ABC*), Tsegayae dramatized “Ethiopian socialism” through embodied and psychic conflicts. Semu, the main character in *ABC*, constantly utters the alphabets in a disorganized speech but using the Ethiopian script:

ሀ ... ብርሃን ሁ ነፃነት (ha ... birhan hu netsanet) [A ... light ... ABC ... Freedom]

ሀሁ ሐቅ እውነተኛነት (he hu haq ewinetegnanet) [AB ... Actuality ... Truth]

ሁ ... ህብረተሰባዊነት (hu ... hibretesebawinet) [C ... Unity of-Human-ness]

የ...የፍርሃት ውርስ የሌለበት (ye – yefirhat wirs yelelebet)

[Wh ... Where no fear prevails]

እ... ምነት - እውነት - ብ - ብርሃን - ሐብረት (e - emnet - ewnet b – birhan - hibret)

[B...Belief ...Truth...L- Light – Union]

አ...አዎን ነፃነት አንድነት (a...awon netsanet andinet)

[Y Yes, Freedom Unity]. (*Ha Hu* 20)³⁷

sky but in flattening out and rejection and/or delaying of differences in the everyday social relations. Mahmood Mamdani *Citizen and Subject*.

³⁵ Tsegaye invited *Lij* Michael Emiru and the top military leaders of the *Derg* to show them how he thought of the conditions of Ethiopia's past and the revolution as much as he used it to critique them. Interview with Getachew Debalqe who played the character to whom an improvisation was added to critique *Lij* Michael Emiru.

³⁶ Known also as Ethiopic, *Ge'ez* script is one of the ancient African writing systems. Ayele “Dynamic” 53.

³⁷ Tsegaye uses the repetition of the first alphabets of the Ethiopic script mainly to show how Semu's speech is disorganized. In fact, the character's disorganized speech is due to his mental illness and Tsegaye wants also to show the contrast between Tidu (the western educated orator whose speech is full of certainty and fluency) and Semu (whose speech is disorganized and uncertain). Though Semu insisting on teaching the children the Ethiopian script, which begins with *ha hu*, Tsegaye does not directly evoke the Ethiopian

Semu is a non-hero but becomes a hero, at last, collaborating with other people who came from different classes including the *déclassé* or what Marxist-Leninist politicians would call *lumpenproletariat*. In the house that is shaking and crumbling due to the force of the bulldozer, which is opening a new (metaphorically socialist) road, his family's Godfather 'crucified' Semu on a cross and baptized him with holy water. Suffering with and for the people, Semu is portrayed as an uncertain protagonist who would later collaborate with others to save Ethiopia that was troubled not just for the old system was rotten but because of the "obliviousness" of the 'revolutionary' forces too. Semu fled the famine-stricken northeastern part of Ethiopia because he could not feed his starving students.³⁸ Though he is now in Addis Ababa, being treated with spiritual healing, he still believes he can and he should teach children.

The playwright staged his ideas of *light, freedom, truth, faith*, and *union/unity* as the main tenets of Ethiopian socialism through Semu's fractured being and becoming. Unlike the other leftist movements that posited the proletarian as the vanguard of the revolution, Tsegaye depicted the teacher who 'has lived and suffered with' the people and other marginalized people as potential leaders. The poverty, injustice, and lack of knowledge disturb Semu to his core. Hence, he desires to see light and to have freedom. Yet, the playwright does not want his character to break with the past. In order to show how the socialist revolution can build on the past heritage as it departs from it, Tsegaye depicts a deaf character called Ayaya Qale.

script in relation to local knowledge system and in opposition to the language that western educated Ethiopian elites speak.

³⁸ (Tsegaye witnessed the atrocities suffered by his fellow Ethiopians when he traveled to northern Ethiopia in the eve of the revolution. In the interview he had with Belcher, Tsegaye said, "I came face to face with hell" (Wendy B. 32).

In the play, Ayaya Qale, wandering in the city after he fled his famine-stricken province with a young girl called Tiqqiille, has something worthy to pass onto the protagonist Semu. The character Ayaya Qale cannot understand what the ‘modern’ revolutionaries are talking about. He says that he is just bewildered. Ayaya Qale, the deaf character who also symbolically represents the unspeaking (or rather the silenced) mass, wants to pass his treasures onto the teacher, Semu who suffered with and for the people.³⁹ Tiqqiille translates Ayaya Qale’s gestures and expressions to Semu:

Ayaya Qale says that this is the heritage I want to pass onto you. Please accept my *gufta* [scarf] - It’s my banner, my name, my magic, my identity, my special endowment, and my heritage. (She puts each and every object at the foot of Semu). Please take this *qil* [calabash] - which I use as a water jar. It’s my food in my journey. Please take my *aqomada* [bag made of skin goat] - which is my bread and butter, my wealth. Please take my *gildim* [a cloth that I wear around my waist] - It’s my song, my mobile house, my fortune. Please accept my *mequamiya* [prayer stick] - It’s my strength, my faith, my power. Please take my *senselet* [chain] - my unity, my love, my responsibility, my treasure. Please take it. It’s the heritage that I want to pass on to you. (Getting nearer to him and stretching her hands to his chained hands). Please take this *tena adam* [a folk medicine].

(63-64)

³⁹ His suffering was shown symbolically when he was tied to a large wooden cross as he was baptized with holy water in the name of exorcism. Being a non-hero, this character, Semu, fell sick because he could not feed his students who were dying of famine.

Tsegaye used various dramatic techniques such as bricolage (of assorted objects), symbolism, and metonymy to stage Ethiopian socialism through embodied movements of characters on stage. One of the ideas that Tsegaye espoused in Ethiopian socialism was understanding and revitalization of indigenous knowledge systems of various societies in Ethiopia. Hence, the objects that Ayaya Qale passed to Semu symbolized the diverse marginalized cultures as well as the knowledge embedded in them. The *gufta* (scarf), *qil* (calabash), *aqomada* (bag), *gildim* (men's skirt), *mequamiya* (prayer stick), *senselet* (chain) and a folk medicine: Assembled from diverse religions and ethnic backgrounds, for Tsegaye, these objects are not just relics from the past but embodied knowledge reinterpreted for the revolutionary moment. This is what some Ethiopian socialists called an ideology embedded in indigenous knowledge systems.

Through these characters, he was also showing what heritage, knowledge, and inspiration the new generation should receive from its past in order to confront the dangers of self-denigration in the present. In so doing, Tsegaye was calling for a revolutionary awakening or “renaissance.”⁴⁰ Unlike the ‘Marxist-Leninist’ civilians who advocated for a break with Ethiopia’s traditional past, Tsegaye insisted on understanding the people’s problems and knowledge systems very well. Hence, Tsegaye used the relation between Semu and Ayaya Qale to also critique what he called Eurocentric revolutionaries by asking what it meant to speak for and as the people/masses.

⁴⁰ Tsegaye, at times, insisted on that the Ethiopian political and artistic (cultural) fields should not fall victims to the cold war politics, thereby, to the western and the eastern blocks.

Speaking *for* the People: Who Can/not Speak?

In his play, *ABC* that he staged at the beginning of the 1974 revolution, Tsegaye asked whether the people “can” or “cannot speak”? The metanarrative of Ethiopian exceptionalism places the country as has never been colonized because Ethiopia defeated a white European power in 1896 and in the five-year guerrilla warfare against Italian colonial (fascist) power in 1935-1941. While he acknowledged this aspect of the decolonization struggle, Tsegaye problematized the idea of independence by taking the epistemic formation of the Ethiopian ‘modern’ elites in relation to ‘colonial’ knowledge production. With this general framing, he staged the conflict between Eurocentric elites (bourgeois and leftist) and the ordinary people at large. He calls the wider people using different names such as ‘the poor, the masses, the silenced, the deaf, the multitudes’ contrasting them with the elites. For Tsegaye, the category of the elite constitutes the bourgeoisie aristocracy (as I have discussed it in relation to his critique of *Lij* Michael), the middle and high ranking military (including those who formed the Provisional Government), and some leftists who came from Europe and North America to join the revolutionary movement at home.

Performance was one site where Tsegaye articulated these ideas. Even though he is a character depicted as an organic intellectual who lives with and knows the people closely, the schizophrenic character Semu makes himself part of the Eurocentric elites that the playwright set to critique. Stumbling all along, Semu rants:

F - Fancy, Alien’s clinker bricks

Cr - Created not in the image of Ethiopia, but in the image of colonialists

W – We, the satanized, sanitized

Ci - Civilized at the expense of our compatriots' labor

Wh – While we are endowed with history, civilization, and culture. (43)

Naming certain elites “alien’s bricks,” Tsegaye raised three issues at once. First, he spoke to foreign colonial powers that intervened in Ethiopia’s affairs. At this level, Tsegaye was laying bare imperialist interpolation in neocolonial Ethiopia. He also showed how foreign powers created local elites as their surrogates to realize their intervention. At another register, Tsegaye showed how these elites are alienated from the people. In an interview he had with a leftist magazine, Tsegaye critiqued the so-called objective distance that in a way “aliniat[ed]” the elites from the people: “If we continue to distance ourselves from the people and still talk about them, that can only be a gossip not telling their stories of dreams and desires. Unless we go into the people, know their nuances, and be like them, we can only be critics but not artists” (“Interview with Tsegaye” 28). Through the invocation of exploitation of the people’s labor, Tsegaye then revealed the ways in which the elites alienated the people. Tsegaye argued, the “avaricious and voracious” elites turned out to be “satanized” evils in the name of civilization/sanitization through empiricist reasoning. He argued that the Eurocentric elites abstracted both the people’s labor and the local “history, civilization, and culture.” Tsegaye showed that the people were spoken *for*. He argued, ‘It is not about for the people.’ [...] It is the attempt to think for the people, to create for the people that have slowed down [the making of] literature” (27).

For Tsegaye, the people can and cannot speak at once. In *ABC*, we see when the intelligentsia mutes the masses because they misrepresent the desire and actions of the people. The deaf character, Ayaya Qale in *ABC* symbolically represents the people that the Eurocentric elites silenced. Tiqqille, the little girl who travels with him begging people to give her something to eat, translates the actions of Ayaya Qale. Tiqqille translates as Ayaya Qale mimes: “I’m deaf. Deaf. I’m a deaf traveler. A deaf traveler, an iterant.” Talking about the demonstrations and the attendant crackdown in which Haile Selassie’s government soldier killed a student who turned out to be his own son, Ayaya Qale says: “I don’t know what is going on. I don’t get it. I don’t think that our country is healthy.”

The playwright suggested that Ayaya Qale was not naturally deaf but disabled by the deeds of the Eurocentric elites. On Ayaya Qale’s skirt, there are polka spots made of newspaper clips from almost all national newspapers and magazines: *Addis Zemen*, *Ethiopian Herald*, *Addis Suar*, *Yezareyitu Ethiopia*, *Mennen*, and *Ethiopia Mirror*. The stage direction further reads: “At the top of his prayer stick, there is an old flag. His calabash is a globe that is used as a banner by Ethiopian television news.” The state media and its narrative of the old Solomonic dynasty burdened Ayaya Qale to the point of making him deaf(ened)/speech-less. Portraying the western educated elites as journalists (as we also observe in another play, *Mother Courage*), Tsegaye was suggesting the elites were participating in silencing the people. The playwright complicated the speech problematic showing how the elites claimed that the masses were

speaking. Semu, openly says that “Yet [the Eurocentric elites] claim that the people speak.” He continues:

Just forcing the people to wage victory
 Saying, “the deaf has opened his mouth”
 While the silenced has not spoken
 While it is the silencer who chatters
 [...]

 If we say the deaf has spoken
 That’s a lie! Lie! Lie. (44-46)

So, would that mean that the people cannot speak forever? One would ask. For Tsegaye, the answer would be ‘no, it is otherwise.’ Let alone Haile Selassie’s bourgeoisie aristocrats, neither the Marxist students nor the Ethiopian socialist military could lead the revolution (“Interview with Tsegaye” 27; *Ha Hu* 44). Tsegaye sought no vanguardism. In his theoretical essays, interviews, plays, and poems (in which he often theorized), Tsegaye outlined that the people were capable of forming their own knowledge and speaking using their own language and actions. In one of his interviews, Tsegaye stated that:

It is the people who change their life. The people won’t wait for anyone.
 The masses should not expect the state, the soldiery, or the student to
 change their lives. They should be awakened and make themselves known.
 Once they are awakened, they will lead their own lives and be masters of

themselves. They have become so and they will be. (“Interview with Tsegaye” 27)

Hence, in his view, culture and arts in general and plays in particular need to be mobilized to let the people see the complex situation in a nuanced manner. For instance, Tsegaye staged the wretched lives of Ethiopians in *Mother Courage* in order to expose the multifaceted exploitations and “call for a revolution.” He said that his task as a playwright was to bring forth the multifaceted class struggles without according unique leadership to the proletariat. He believed that the people would and were already participating in the revolution using their embodied epistemology that they gained through suffering (*kemekeraw tekerakiro*). Tsegaye insisted on the relevance and vitality of critical cultural intervention or Cultural Revolution in the whole socialist transformation of society (“Ye’Kine Tibeb Abetuta” 3). He invoked consideration of the masses in his national mobilization of resources and establishment of institutions.

Theoretical Places: Invention of Ethiopian Socialist Culture and Art Spaces

When he spoke about the national cultural affairs, Tsegaye put the marginalized masses at the center:

The Ministry [of Culture] needs to follow Ethiopian socialism, to attend to the lives of the masses, and to embrace the arts of the mass. [...] It should be a ministry that embraces, translates, and follows the lives of the mass and the people’s culture. This comes from the people. The Ministry of Culture is an instrument to nurture the people’s culture. (“Interview with Tsegaye” 29)

Tsegaye made a case for the establishment of national cultural institutions and a socialist cultural revolution.

For the last 30 years, an indigenous national institution of Ethiopian-ness, that would build our generation's minds in a modern way in light of our cultural heritage, has never been established through proper and well-equipped governmental organization by using informed and candid minds of a nation. ("Hibrete seb'awinet be'Ethiopia" 22)

Once he held Haile Selassie's regime accountable for not giving due attention to culture in general and arts in particular. Indeed the revolution inherited the buildings of Haile Selassie (National), Love of the Country, Municipality, Ambassador and other (movie) theatres found in Addis Ababa and some provincial towns like Nazareth (currently known as Adama), Asmara (currently the capital of Eritrea), Harar, and Dire Dawa.⁴¹ However, artists of the Patriotic and Haile Selassie (National) theatres were swaying between various organizations, such as the Education and Information ministries, neither being considered permanent civil servants nor having a regular salary. Two, Tsegaye was calling for a new national institution to rethink what it meant to be human in an Ethiopian empire which based its rule on a "feudo-bourgeoisie" system that created "ethnic and religious dominance" in the age of imperialism, neo/colonialism, and apartheid (23).

The Ministry of Culture was established by a proclamation in 1977 setting the following departments that would execute its distinct objectives: arts and theatre; the

⁴¹ It is quite interesting to see that it is these buildings still standing as prominent spaces for artistic performances. In spite of the rhetoric of cultural justice that the subsequent governments that came after the demise of Haile Selassie I (both the *Derg* and the incumbent EPRDF), the major theatres are still the ones the emperor built.

study and preservation of the cultural heritage; national library and historical archives; Ethiopian language academy; and international cultural relations. The objectives of the Ministry are: To arrange for the organization and promotion of culture and the arts in accordance with the principles of socialism and to encourage the creative power of the masses in the fine arts; To administer and control the National Library as well as protect and preserve historical archives; To study Ethiopian pre-history, history and other ancient relics; make the necessary provisions for discovery, protection and study ancient monuments and documents, and keep a register of the antiquities with detailed descriptions; To promote the study of Ethiopian languages and the development of scripts from them (Aleme 37-42).

Even though the Ministry was established in 1977, Tsegaye had played a key role in re/organizing the ministry of culture since the inception of the Ministry in 1975. Tsegaye directed the Department of Arts and Theatre, which led and supervised the theatre, music, fine arts, and literary institutions across the capital city and the country. The former minister of the Ministry of Culture, Dr. Aklilu Habte told me that “We never intervened in Tsegaye’s administration of the Department of Arts and Theatre.”

The departments under the Ministry of Culture were to be mobilized towards the fight against imperial ethnic and religious hegemony, inter/national racism, Eurocentrism, and neo/colonialism. The ministry was responsible for the promotion of diversity as well as the rethinking of universal humanity. The subjectivity Tsegaye articulated was epitomized in his idea of Ethiopian socialism. Using the left-leaning condition of the revolution and contributing to the discursive formation of an Ethiopian socialist ideology,

Tsegaye stood in the forefront in the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Department of Arts and Theatre.

The Ministry became the Headquarter from which the re/inventions, studies, and supervisions of manifold cultural apparatuses and activities were dispensed.⁴² Coming from the margin to the center due to the performers' tactical struggle in the revolution, Tsegaye started to map strategies. According to Michel de Certeau, "[S]trategies are actions" that "elaborate theoretical places [...] capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed" (*Practice* 38). Hence, Tsegaye used both the Ministry of Culture and state-owned theatres to dispense his Ethiopian socialist discourse through plays that "monopolized" particularly the National Theatre.

The discourses that informed the establishment of the Ministry of Culture also made the re/organization of national artistic spaces possible. The Department of Arts and Theatre supervised around forty-one cinemas and theatres all over Ethiopia. It also collaborated with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to coordinate the newly constructed halls, that would serve as theatres and cinemas, which were owned by *kebeles* (local administrations) and peasant associations across the country. Aside from the National and Love of the Country theatres, the department also supervised the well-known classical music school, Yared Music School (founded in 1956/57), the School of Fine arts (established in 1957/58), the new Film Center and other institutions.

⁴² In the conversation I had with the former minister of the Ministry of Culture, Dr. Aklilu Habte, who worked with Tsegaye, it was discussed that Tsegaye actively involved in the development of a socialist ideology that would inform the conceptions that guided the actions of the Ministry. According to Dr. Aklilu Habte, the discussions ranged from the idea of breaking with the cultures of the traditional past (by even burning all monuments and documents that were labeled as relics of "feudo-bourgeoisie") to different articulations of socialism. Tsegaye was advocating for the "scientific" archeological study and critical anthropology.

Aside from his roles as vice minister, Tsegaye was also specifically invested in the reinvention of the “national theatre” to craft inter/national cultural, artistic and political missions. By invoking the notion of *National Theatre*, Tsegaye was not just referring to the actual “National Theatre” that he directly administered but also to the Love of the Country or Patriotic Association Theatre since his idea of Ethiopian socialism assigned similar roles to all cultural institutions in Ethiopia. He said: “The responsibility of the Ethiopian National Theatre in a local and global space is to celebrate all the nation’s arts and let them be celebrated as it gets itself known through letting the arts be known” (“Letter to Telela”).

Possibilities of a Negative Thinking: Performing *Mother Courage*

Exposing the struggle in the past and the present, I maintain, Tsegaye’s plays were unsettling both the established (Haile Selassie’s feudo-bourgeoisie-neocolonial rule) and emerging (Eurocentric leftist) violent state of affairs. In the figure of Benjamin’s *Angel of History*, there lies a possibility to see important constellations: the storm of the 1974 revolution or the revolution as a storm, the surge of victory/hope, and ruins of Haile Selassie’s empire with all their dialectical confrontations.

[The face of the Angel of history] is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he sees* one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him

irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm. (“Concept of History” 392)

The Paradise the *Angel* envisions is not a serene space found hereafter, beyond this world but an earthly might from whose belly a severe storm wreaks havoc on the present. The storm results in wreckages that pile up at the feet of the Angel. Appearing as a Paradise, time bewilders the angel as if it were the future. Yet, the progressive’s back is turned to the future while his eyes are fixed on the debris of the past. His hopes are thrown together with the ruins from the past. Neither devoid of contradiction nor being a unilinear progress, this sensibility of the past is informed by what Benjamin calls dialectical materialist understanding of history.

In the wake of the successful staging of *ABC* and in the inauguration of *Mother Courage*, where the higher leadership of the Military Council were present, Tsegaye said, “When everyone mentions about yesterday, it is better not to forget that there was a fierce struggle.” With these words, Tsegaye was alluding to the participation of his play, *ABC* at the beginning of the 1974 revolution by critiquing Haile Selassie’s bourgeoisie aristocrats, who were about to co-opt the people’s struggle. In another occasion, he showed how the present time-space is punctured by contradictions when he said the “people’s feeling about the present is of victory and death” (“Interview with Tsegaye” 27). It was this sensibility of dialectics and history as fragmentary and contradictory that informed his play, *Enat Alem Tenu* (*Mother Courage*), an adoption from Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

Tsegaye's *Mother Courage* is epic in the Brechtian sense. It stages fragmentary time-space with what Brecht calls social gest, where "continual battle" happens on a "slippery surface" (*On Theatre* 104). Tsegaye adapts only certain aspects of Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, including his ideas of reality (revealing abstracted realities and class struggle) and history (fragmentary and open-ended). Nevertheless, it needs to be noted that Tsegaye's epic theatre is also informed by his conception of *negritude*, that gives credence to and makes use of (regenerates) Ethiopia's (Africa's) hybrid languages, performances, knowledge systems and ancient civilizations. Put differently, what animates Tsegaye's political theatre is his project of Ethiopian socialism. His project sets forth to make the diverse cultures and languages of the nation known to the world by attending to the ruptures and contradictions in the past and the present moments.

Tsegaye's *Mother Courage* opens with stage smoke wafting through the dark space, thrusting fog into the auditorium. In this misty space, a flickering lamp's light from downstage confronts the vast darkness while two songs are heard at once: a fascist song hailing Benito Mussolini, *Duce Duce*, and a freedom song, *O Ethiopia*. The melodies surge not as separate tunes but as part of a *double concerto*, which the playwright calls *duet concerto*. Tsegaye picks the term *concerto*, which is derived from an Italian term *concerti*, to historicize the post/colonial relations between Italy and Ethiopia.⁴³ Using this mode of staging, Tsegaye brings the song, *Duce Duce* as debris

⁴³ *Concerto* is an Anglicized Italian word, *concerti*, whose origin could be traced to a couple of Latin words, *conserere* which means to tie, to join, or to weave and *certamen* meaning competition or fight. In *corncerto*, the soloist and the orchestra intersperse oppositional episodes as they cooperate and independently perform melodic lines.

from the five-year Italian colonial occupation that confronts the freedom song, *O Ethiopia* in the postcolonial moment. In this *double concerto*, the conflict is intensified contrapuntally. Given that Tsegaye throws a song from the colonial-fascist time of Mussolini together with a freedom melody sung in the postcolonial moment of Haile Selassie's time, he is collapsing a unilinear progressive temporality. The polyphonic sound, light, and smoke do not just pass through the air in time, though. Tsegaye spatializes as much as he historicizes, exposing the embodied struggle on stage.

This is the space in which *Enat Alem Tenu*'s characters move. In front of the prison, there is a lively small market. Behind the market, at the edge of the prison's fence, there is a verandah where a local judge's court would convene. At the right side, there stand gallows where people would be lashed and lynched. Behind the gallows, there is a tower in which a soldier/guard stands to watch over the prisoners with his back turned to the audience. In this space, Tsegaye's *Mother Courage* shows lived experiences of the Italian fascist-colonial period and Haile Selassie's epoch ending with an emergent revolution.

In the play, there are two main Mother Courages as the playwright splits Brecht's Anna Fierling into Enat Alem Tenu (grandmother) and Ade Wiqaw (mother). The daughters of Ade Wiqaw, Sora (deaf) and Tonno, are the other two female characters we find in the play. Tenu's wagon carries her grandchildren, girls and boys, displaying that they are for sale with price tags on their bodies. Tenu is a mother-in-law for Ade Wiqaw who is suffering from mental illness due to the anguish her family has to endure. Her

husband, Dambel, is a freedom fighter during the five-year Italian colonial occupation. In the wake of the victory of fascist Italy, when Haile Selassie comes back to power from his exile in Bath, England, this freedom fighter gets imprisoned.

The body of Bely Zeleqe, a freedom fighter lynched by Haile Selassie in real life, is sagging. Next to this body, Ade Wiqaw draws imaginary lines on the stage, similar to a hopscotch grid, and hops over the lines with a single foot. She jumps back and forth into a new temporality that is drawn on the space, saying:

From Iyasu [1913-1916] to Teferi [regent 1916-1930] - O time, how
fleeting you are

From Teferi [1916-1935] to Ttale Biru [Fascist Italy – 1935-1941] - O
time, how fragmentary you are

Ttale Biru to Teferi [1941-1974] - once again, time is troubled and
troubled. (*Ha Hu* 79)

[...]

Flying from Geneva to Shewa. From Africa to America. From far west to far East.
From Asia to Russia. From here to here. From here to there. [...] It is said that my
husband is pardoned and released upon the 80th birthday [of Emperor Haile
Selassie] on July 22nd. They also say that my son is going to be lynched. (127)

Three things are fascinating about this travel in time-space: (1) time is spatialized or space lumps time (Lefebvre 339) (2) her travel into a new time-space is precarious as she is using a single foot, and (3) She moves forward and turns back using similar imaginary lines/spaces while uttering that she jumps into new epochs.

Ade Wiqaw's son, who is Mother Courage's grandson, is imprisoned for saying "the king has to be ousted." On the 80th birthday of the old King, Haile Selassie I, Dambel gets released from prison whereas his son is killed. When the revolution arrives at this juncture, the play ends when Tenu and Ade Wiqaw bring their dead son to the center stage. They sing a song of hope with the chorus as they grieve. Tsegaye staged history as "victory and death" ("Interview with Tsegaye" 28). He brought forth the dead body of a young man as a ruin from the past and contrasted the body/ruin contrapuntally with the new hope of the revolutionary moment, which Tsegaye posited as an open-ended time-space. When Ade Wiqaw jumps in time in a precarious and fragmentary way, it is at once a spatial movement. In Lefebvrian understanding of time-space, the idea of time lumping space entails that contradictions/dialectical changes in time are already embedded in contradictions in space or in multidirectional social relations that are taking place in particular spaces. Paradoxically, however, that same theory was riddled by paradoxes and homogenized time so as to erect institutions, draw boundaries, and eject bodies that his theory rendered as abject. It is to this discussion that I now turn.

Inadequacy, Inconsistency, and Inequality: Re-inventing 'Abject' Bodies

The ways in which Tsegaye translates his concept of Ethiopian socialism into a trans/national cultural project through the establishment of the National Theatre as an idea and as a place offers an alternative vision in the revolution through staging the lived experiences of the ordinary people. Yet it is also riddled with inadequacy and paradoxes. His vision of freedom was punctured by contradictions. Whereas he worked with the female performers as comrades-in-arms, Tsegaye misrepresented the female performers

as impure bodies that stifled the socialist progress. How did this speak to the tensions in relations of productions and female performers' subjectivities? Here, I want to think with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's idea of "reproductive heteronormativity (RHN)" that helps us see how a liberatory project would participate in reproducing relations of productions "without any infrastructural involvement."⁴⁴ She writes:

[T]he "singular," as it combats the universal-particular binary opposition, is not an individual, a person, an agent; multiplicity is not a multitude. If, however, we are thinking of potential agents, when s/he is not publicly empowered to put aside difference and self-synecdochize to form collectivity, the group will take difference itself as its synecdochic element. Difference slides into "culture," often indistinguishable from "religion." And then the institution that provides agency is reproductive heteronormativity (RHN). It is the broadest and oldest global institution.

(Aesthetic Education 437)

Tsegaye rethought Eurocentric universalism that centered the white liberal man as a self-contained subject that defined himself against the other. He acknowledged particular differences widening his world-view based on critical and self-reflexive relations with the other. In so doing, Tsegaye gestured towards reinvention of universal history and global humanities. Nonetheless, Tsegaye theorized and staged the marginalized poor in a collective term (as people/masses/multitudes/ethnic and religious groups). In this

⁴⁴ Gayatri Spivak does not refer to "heterosexual intercourse" yet cognizant of the fact that "we are in a double bind with the RHN through the variety of our sexualities." She widens the notion of normativity to various kinds of reproductions that range from capitalism to sexism. See Spivak *Aesthetic Education* 429-442.

conception of agency, as Spivak notes it, the “‘singular’ is not an individual.” It captures difference as a collective. Although Tsegaye critiqued some leftist leaders of the student movements for “speaking for” and “silencing” the people, self-synecdochization was at work when he advised artists to “go into the people, know their nuances, and be like them.” Following Spivak, I want to ask, what made it possible for a male playwright-theatre administrator to “be like” the female performers while these women (with all heterogeneity) were not in a position to be like male theatre makers-administrators? The tendency of being “like” the marginalized other may exhibit a good intention yet it can “only be that, and at best,” Spivak would say (438). Given that Tsegaye was holding the female performers accountable without counting them as persons and in the absence of “infrastructural” change, reproductive heteronormativity was at work in his re-establishment of the National Theatre as an Ethiopian socialist space. I would say, following Spivak, this “broadest and oldest global institution” of heteronormativity has been working from the site of historicism that homogenizes time even as it attends to contradiction and change.

When it comes to the relation between the state-owned theatres and the female performers, Tsegaye’s theorization of revolutionary change was predicted by temporal conflicts. That permitted the theatres to make the female performers responsible for the moral and cultural decadence of the people in general and the artistic space in particular. Tsegaye said the following in the dismissal letter he wrote to Telela Kebede:

Unlike [yesterday], *today*, in this time of freedom and cultural renaissance, if artists do not refrain from indulging themselves into a *defiled* lifestyle,

criticizing, correcting, teaching and inspiring people would be incongruous. Pleading for this reality, we reached an agreement after we had discussed the matter with the highest official. You remember that we had given three months of advanced warning for artists who are engaged in and getting special income from the *defiled* part-time *prostitution* and liquor business [through a public message posted to all the employees on the National Theatre's noticeboard] telling them to choose either their *defiled* trade or their profession and close their cabaret. ("Dismissal Letter")

The revolutionary moment was signified as a "time of freedom and cultural renaissance." *Yesterday* belonged to Haile Selassie's time marked by excessive 'impurity' and 'defilement' typified in these recurring, thereby, underscored words: "defiled lifestyle," "defiled part-time prostitution," "defiled" cabaret business. Assigning roles of "*criticizing, correcting, teaching and inspiring people*," an Ethiopian socialist progress delineated the boundary between a sacred "stage-temple" and a "defiled" cabaret.⁴⁵

One of the paradoxes evident in Tsegaye's conception of Ethiopian socialism is reflected in his idea about change in time-space. Even though he attests that there would be a contradictory moment where "victory and death" exist in the present, he also says that "[progress] is not about building on a rotten history" ("Interview with Tsegaye" 27).

⁴⁵ At this point, Tsegaye was holding the new generation, especially those theatre graduates who now administered the theatres he once led and whom he accused of chewing the herbal stimulant *khat*, which is associated with fostering creativity. Yet, the character's insult aims also at authorities who have not allowed the critical theatre to come to the stage for almost two decades as Ethiopia was under the military Marxist regime for seventeen years.

In this socialist temporality, the angel of progress considered the female performers' bodies as 'profane' monuments of Haile Selassie's that should be demolished than debris of the past who could offer the occasion to think of historical material conditions that inform their fragmented subjectivities. "A progressive's eyes are fixed on tomorrow from today," Tsegaye posits his Ethiopian socialist temporality, "today is a new chapter [and] it is unlucky not to understand time this way." Unlike Benjamin's Angel of history, this one does not seem to be caught up in a dialectical tension between ruins and hope. He rather gives a unified identity to the past (as decadent) and the present and future (as 'time of freedom') when he deals with Haile Selassie's rule and the lived experiences of the female performers. For history cannot be built on the "rotten past," in Tsegaye's view, some wreckages from the past should be cleared from the way of the progressive's time as its space should be cleaned.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that the revolutionary spatial management wanted to redeem the past, it imported a similar moral economy from the theatre administration and performance tradition of Haile Selassie's time through invocation of the stage as a temple nay the theatre as a stage-temple (*medrek-mekdes*). In the play titled *Ha Hu weym Pe Pu* (*ABC or XWZ*), which Tsegaye presented in 1992 building on his *Ha Hu* (*ABC*) from the 1974 production, Tsegaye directly related the secular stage with a religious temple. One of the main characters, *Nega* who is the son of *Semu*, a major character from *Ha Hu*, insults those who "defile" his *medrek-mekdes* (stage-temple): "The former clergy, who defiled the church by spitting smoking weed and fenugreek are today substituted by the *khat* chewers' whose bewitching spittle defiled the stage" (Tsegaye *Ha Hu weym Pepu*).

Relating the clergy with senior performers most of whom came from the Orthodox Church, Tsegaye was marking both the “father” and “son” (older and younger generations of artists) as defiled. Even though he staged a play titled *Azmari* about the positive role that *azmaris* (minstrels, by extension, artists) would enact in a society, Tsegaye’s attitude reified the existing casteism disparaging this segment of the society. He considered *azmaris* as “chatterboxes” and “embodiments of a travesty” (Tsegaye “Azmari”).

Coupled with the stigma attached to them as members of *azmari* cast group, the female performers’ bodies were always already gendered and sexed as women who lived in heteropatriarchal society. Women’s bodies in Ethiopia have been navigating various public spaces with a great deal of caution for various powers considered them as porous bodies whose fluids would defile so-called pure territories. In Amharic, one of the names given to menstruation is *adef*, which literally means “filth.” Mostly related with biblical stories, it is also translated as “curse.” And a menstrual pad is called *yemergem cherq* meaning a “cloth of curse.”⁴⁶ The fact that most Amharic dictionary meanings take a reader to biblical references clearly shows that how “dirt” is an issue of “disorder” wherein power intervenes to “cleanse.” The notion of filth is often related with “adultery,” which in Amharic has mostly been associated even equated with “prostitution” as it is captured in the name given to sex workers, that is, *zimut adari* (a person, made always already a woman, who lives from adultery).

⁴⁶ Amharic Dictionaries relate the word with biblical stories. For instance, Desta Teklewold refers to *Revelation* when he defines *adef* (filth/mensuration) (87). In the 1611 King James Version, *Revelation* Chapter 17, Verse 4 reads: “And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold, and precious stone & pearles, hauing a golden cup in her hand, full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.”

Citing from the script of what Spivak calls reproductive heteronormativity and not heeding to the structural change that the female performers demanded, the Ethiopian socialist progressive project rendered the female artists' bodies defiled, thereby, abject. Spivak reminds us that reproductive heteronormativity and nationalism has kinship wherein the latter mobilizes the former "as a source of legitimacy" (279). Tsegaye argued for the re-articulation of the "National Theatre" by intertwining issues of ethnicity, religion, inter/national cultural mission, the people/artists' 'moral decadence' and female performers' sexuality. He wrote:

Knowing that it could not render inferior and crush the people's spirit without denigrating and without making the general populations' culture impure, the persons that the former regime assigned in the leadership of cultural institutions were unprofessional and were ashamed of their Ethiopian-ness or they made Ethiopian-ness a monopoly of certain ethnic group or they were the ones who did not care for the culture and arts and would not stand up for the generations' moral and human dignity.

("Hiberete Seb'awinet be'Ethiopia" 7)

His critique of the ethnic domination at the theatres referred to the monopoly of key positions at the national and patriotic theatres by people who favored certain ethnic strand and blood ties. Tsegaye reasoned that the former administrators "were ashamed of their Ethiopian-ness" meaning the diversity in terms of Ethiopian languages, religions, and arts. That, in turn, had an inter/national resonance since Tsegaye believed that a leadership that failed to respect the diversity in the nation would prohibit some arts from

participating in Pan-African festivals as it labeled them as ‘un-Semitic,’ thereby, “un-Ethiopian” (Fasil 153).⁴⁷ Tsegaye already made the former leadership of the theatres responsible for the “denigration, impropriety, and decadence” of the people’s culture.

Tsegaye strategically went on to critique the artists along with the “people” when he said: “Realizing that it could not make the nation’s culture impure and impose a divisive scheme and spirit of inferiority upon the people’s mind without making the characters of the people and the artists impure, the former regime committed and let others commit impropriety against female artists.” In Tsegaye’s view, therefore, it was not just the people’s culture that became “impure” due to the former artistic leadership in particular and Haile Selassie’s empire in general. For him, the artists were also victims of Haile Selassie’s empire. In invoking this victimhood, Tsegaye was showing how culture, particularly, theatre arts participated in the reproduction of “spirit of inferiority,” “impurity” and “divisive[ness].”

Tsegaye’s historicist homogenization of the past and the subsequent moral principles he prescribes placed all the historical burdens on the female performers’ bodies. He argued that “the former regime committed and let others commit impropriety against female artists.” He believed that these performers who were “engaged” in, what

⁴⁷ When his play, *Oda Oak Oracle* was selected by a committee to participate in the All Black Arts Festival in 1966 in Senegal, Dakar, where he had given a copy of the play-script/book to the poet-president Sedar Senghor, some artists and the Ethiopian state took a position that the performance would misrepresent Ethiopia. One of Tsegaye’s “rivals” in the arts called *Oda Oak Oracle* a “juju story for juju men” telling Tsegaye that Ethiopia “is the land of Queen Sheba, lest you have forgotten. We are no bloody savages like the characters in your *Oda Oak Oracle*.” The Minister of Ministry of Education, Dr. Mengesha Gabre-Hiwot also told Tsegaye, Emperor Haile Selassie was “displeased with the subject matter of your play, *Oda Oak Oracle*. He didn’t approve of what you did in Senegal, making a present of it to President Senghor.” Tsegaye’s “rivals” were “bemoaning the travesty, fuming what a crying shame it was that this heathenish, outlandish, un-Ethiopian tale of barbaric rituals of blood and sacrifice would be deemed a fitting representative of national literature” (Fasil).

he termed “scandalous part-time prostitution” made the “advance[ment]” of “the country’s culture and arts in the aim of Ethiopia first and socialist philosophy” impossible. What is important in here is that the construction of the national theatre as an idea and as space cited from and re-inscribed the sexed and gendered patriarchal script while it attempts to legitimize its socialist missions. In the final analysis, in Tsegaye’s view, it was neither the postcolonial patriarchal system nor the former and the current leadership but the female performers who were held accountable for all the cultural malaise that was feared to wreak havoc in the inter/national artistic missions of Ethiopia.

Based on this rationalization, the ‘revolutionary’ theatres committed themselves to manage/‘cleanse’ the actresses’ bodies. First, the Ministry of Culture, particularly the Department of Arts and Theatre, claimed that they would revive the cultural heritage by fighting against the ‘moral decadence’ that Haile Selassie’s regime caused (Aleme; Tsegaye “Hiberete Seb’awinet be’Ethiopia”). Second, the theatres made their prior mission to discipline/cleanse the female performers’ bodies so that they would participate in the proper socialist missions of “criticizing, correcting, teaching and inspiring people” (“Dismissal Letter”; “About Mrs. Telela”).

Hence it can be argued that Tsegaye’s perception and conception of Haile Selassie’s political and aesthetic regimes as defiled were projected onto the lived experiences of the female performers, complicating the Lefebvrian dialectical triad. Tsegaye critiqued the Semitic thesis that aligned Ethiopian sacred subjectivities with Middle Eastern identities at the expense of Ethiopia’s blackness and resulting in denigration and self-hatred on the part of the empire’s others (like the Weyto character,

Gebreyes the Flagellator, in *Enat Alem Tenu*). Considering that historical line as a sign of “impropriety,” Tsegaye then proposed a Pan-African re-articulation of Ethiopian subjectivities in a “proper” re-spatialization. Nonetheless, the projection of ancient regime’s “defilement” on women performers already enacted a gendered and sexualized displacement of the geopolitical and historical redefinition of Ethiopia. This conception of time-space of Haile Selassie’s regime played its part in associating the marking of female bodies with the “rotten past” or the already dead “Yesterday.”

Aside from the material and other benefits he gained at the expense of the labor of female performers in particular and other employees of the National Theatre in general, Tsegaye’s representation of Haile Selassie’s time informs how he reduced space into time when he selectively remembered about the attacks of imperialism, feudalism, and neocolonialism, excising the gendered and sexed nature of the global-local nexus of empires. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that the wider leftist conception of sexual work as a sinful and criminal act committed by only female bodies contributed and gave leverage to Tsegaye’s actions against the female performers at the National and Love of the Country theatres.⁴⁸

As bearers of postcolonial markers of power, the female performers’ bodies at the national and patriotic theatres carried the weight of history of marginalization based on cast, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and disability. Already suffering from the patriarchal system that posed many challenges to their lives as women, female performers’ rights at the state-owned theatres were denied and they did not get either a

⁴⁸ This important aspect will be elaborated and dealt with in the last chapter with a wider focus and further genealogical probing.

regular salary or pension and insurance rights even after the revolution erupted. Their labor was exploited as workers before and during the revolution. A few female performers also carried a direct history of colonial sexualization of black women and the attendant violence wounded their bodies. The disavowal of the historicity of these women's bodies informed the ways in which the Ethiopian socialist program managed them. For these arts institutions sustained the structural problems while they enacted (in the name of) a socialist revolution, the challenges of the female performers would be worse. Their guileful acts need to be sharpened.

Socialist *Progressive* Time, Female Bodies' Spatial Maneuvers

In his conception of spatial stories, Michel de Certeau posits place as the "order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence" and it "excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location" entailing "stability" (Certeau *Everyday* 117). In the politics of place, power produces 'positions' and 'stabilizes' them. This is a politics of fixing a body in *the* place. I call this juxtaposition of bodies *dis/placement* for the reason that the desire to do a *placement* cannot be attained without displacement or performative occlusion of contingent realities somewhere else.

In the multifarious contingent spaces of the (post)colony, black female bodies, in particular, inhabit a very precarious space relegated to the zone of "Passion" though their world does not live in separation from "Desire." Marta Savigliano's notion of political economy of passion is useful to elaborate on the distinction. For Savigliano,

Desire generates Passion in a different space, the space of alterity, as it

longs for it. [...] in allocating Passion always somewhere else (in the past, in remote places and cultures, in bodies marked by a different race, class, religion, sexuality, and/or gender), ["Desires' memory"] forgets that Passion is a power of Desire's own creation. (*Tango* 10)

Be it in the regional empire's violence or colonial conquest or postcolonial desire (in Savigliano's sense of Desire) an Ethiopian woman was a war trophy, a circulating commodity of her society, an object of political marriage, a housewife, a concubine, a prostitute, or a mistress against whom the Desiring subject defined his subjectivity. Her space is produced as the function of the encounter between a Desiring subject and the Passionate body – the weak, exotic, erotic, scandalous, etc.

However, whereas the idea of "proper" place(ment) assumes and effects apposition and stability, space works from a different site of relationality, instability, conflict, fragmentariness, and tension. Calling it "a practiced place," Certeau conceptualizes space considering movement and temporality:

A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. (Certeau *Everyday* 117)

Savigliano's idea of "docile bodies in rebellion" is akin to such kind of space making.

The seemingly fixed or “docile bodies” are always on the move, in “rebellion,” Savigliano says without ascribing innate agency to the marginalized bodies and taking note of “the abuses of male power to which women are submitted.” Even though their moves are precarious, they still matter. Savigliano writes:

True, women did not have a global, revolutionary project in mind; instead, they displayed a series of concrete subversive moves tempered by their interests in survival. In doing so, they reproduced the female stereotypes: prostitutes, mistresses, wives ... but, perhaps the copies were not perfect – subversive reproductions? The women aimed at improving their embodied lives, which in that context meant gaining a more rewarding exploitation, and this was not a minor endeavor. They discovered there was something they could do. (*Tango* 70)

Among the multifarious simulations the female performers enacted I want to show: 1) the ways in which the female artists participated in collaborative dramaturgies by manipulating and making use of the available resources of the 1974 revolution; 2) how they used their “enemy’s” discourse of progress in order to perform or do something else with the *parole* instead of the *langue* of an Ethiopian socialist discourse; 3) the paradox and dialectical tensions embedded in the staging of Ethiopian socialism and the political realities that the female performers’ tactics would reveal; 4) how the actors, particularly the female performers lying in wait, attacked the power that may be by a surprising protest and gained a “temporary” victory.

Collaborative Dramaturgy: Poetic Protest

In order to understand the artificial binary between Haile Selassie's past and the revolutionary moment on the one hand, and to reveal how Tsegaye's coming to the theatre was the result of the performers' struggle, I want to show how the performers, particularly many of the actresses, seized the opportunity presented by the revolution and used a creative dramaturgy to stage a get-together party as a protest. Whereas the Haile Selassie I Theatre (before Tsegaye came and renamed it) was filled with scripted plays that could not question the *status quo*, a group of performers at theatre widened the space of the stage and inserted a new genre of political performance through inventive dramaturgy that accounted for co-creation. In order to expose and challenge the paradoxes as well as the inequalities in the institutionalized aesthetics of Haile Selassie's empire, the performers carefully took a detour and rallied other colleagues to seize the revolutionary moment and stage a get-together party as a protest.

Their embodied actions can be read as a collective dramaturgy enacted from within or a dialectical act of reading, analyzing, script writing, and staging in order to communicate a political message to some designated spectators.⁴⁹ In their struggle against the *status quo* at the state-owned theatres, this group of performers cautiously collaborated with other *actors* – performers, directors, musicians, writers, cleaners, ushers, technicians, and some administrative staff of Haile Selassie I theatre. They read

⁴⁹ Conversations with Telela, Alganesh, and Getachew D. Here, I use Bertolt Brecht's idea of dramaturgy as a mode of thought as it offers a critical perspective shifting the gaze from the philosopher-dramaturg to a collective practice/ collaborative dramaturgy and performance. Working towards the realization of epic theatre, Brecht rethinks dramaturgy as a dialectical performative practice in order to revolutionize the relation within the actors (who participated in the dramaturgy) and between the actors and the spectators. (Brecht *The Messingkauf Dialogues*).

their condition at the theatre as abject, and conceived their plots that “took note of the theatres’ patron-client relations based on class interests, blood ties, and ethnic strand.”⁵⁰ Accordingly, this group of performers discussed itineraries of the protest, wrote scripts (pamphlets, notices, and a manifesto), used words of mouth, and enacted a poetic protest by organizing a get-together party to which spectators/opponents (some administrative officials) were invited as guests.

Observing the intensity of the 1974 revolutionary movements, one of the keen witnesses of the event, René Lefort calls the actions “the wave of social unrest” wherein “the breath of freedom and flood of demands that washed over Addis Ababa revealed the regime no longer had a base” (*Heretical Revolution* 54-55). Andargachew Tiruneh states about particular instances of the demonstrations held by workers of governmental and semi-governmental organizations: “Almost all of them gave prominence to the demands for the dismissal of certain of their officials” (Andargachew T. 47). The waves of unrest created the condition for the people to pose demands and oust their executives, including ministers and the mayor of the capital. However, I argue that attending to particular ways of enacting insurgency is important to see how various long-standing power relations informed the forms of protests that different marginalized groups enacted.

“When the revolution erupted we seized the moment of *yiwredulin* [demands of dismissal],” Telela told me when we discussed participation of female artists in the beginning of the 1974 revolution. She continued: “Those were the days of ‘*netsanet gedame*’ [space of freedom] or rather it seemed like that. But it was only provisional. It

⁵⁰ Telela Kebede and Getachew Debalqe discussed with me that the group which took the initiative to galvanize support and to organize the party/protest had to carefully avoid the involvement of such employees to “avoid preemptive measures” on the part of the administration.

was until *Derg* [the military junta] controlled power. Every organization was ousting its officials. We also did that. Yet, it should be noted that it was a new experience for us and it was not easy at all.”⁵¹

It was this condition that obliged the artists to use a tactical collaborative dramaturgy, to conduct their activism clandestinely and enact it as a performative. A careful process of identifying “supporters” and “opponents” was underway. For an “enemy” would not be allowed to infiltrate the organization of the protest. Yet, for the female performers involved in this action, the director of both Haile Selassie I and Patriotic theatres, Captain Atnafu Mekonnen was considered a “major enemy” [*wanaw telat*], thereby, the main target of their protest. In their view, he did not just become reluctant to change their position in the theatre but also waged war against their nightclub businesses. Hence, the actresses started their activism by using their close contacts with widely acclaimed and reputable journalists. Both the actresses and journalists worked under the Ministry of Information, and the latter used to spend most of their leisure time at the female performers’ cabarets. The actresses were using this intimate relation to speak about their condition and expose Captain Atnafu Mekonnen’s administration.

After exploring the issues at Haile Selassie I, the Patriotic Association and the cabarets, the journalists at *Menen* magazine revealed how Captain Atnafu was inconsistent when he wrestled with the involvement of the female performers in part-time bar business (“Komaritua Tewanay”). The journalists uncovered how Captain Atnafu had been supportive of the female actresses when he said to another newspaper that the theatres could not force the women to close their cabarets without paying them enough

⁵¹ Conversation with Telela.

salary and per diem. They further showed how Captain Atnafu had gone to the extent of witnessing the ways in which the actresses used their own money that they earned from the nightclub business to support the theatres. Exposing the paradoxes, the journalists demonstrated how Captain Atnafu and Eyoel Yohannes (administrator at the Patriotic theatre) currently produced a number of reasons to force the actresses to close their cabarets.⁵² The magazine unearthed the ways in which the theatre administration justified its objection to the nightclub businesses owned by its actresses.

According to these officials, the female performers brought disgrace to the theatre apart from adversely affecting the energy of the diurnal artistic productions at the theatres due to their nocturnal life at their cabarets. The officials argued that ordinary clients at the cabarets degraded the female performers who earned huge respect at the theatres; the female performers' role as one 'moral authority' was violated because they were being penalized by the court for breaking the curfew sanctioned by the government; and the actresses should not "prostitute," but bear with the challenges if they wanted to remain professional artists.

As the narrative coming from the theatres was informed by an ethical standard defining the theatre as a "moral authority," most of the female performers had to remain anonymous when challenging the theatre administration in public spaces for fear of retaliation. Laying bare the sexualizing undertone embedded in Captain Atnafu's and Eyoel Yohannes's rationalization, one female performer said to *Menen* magazine that she was slaving herself in the bar business to get additional income and to improve her life,

⁵² Eyoel Yohannes, the administrator at the Love of the Cuntry (Patriotic Association) theatre, had been serving at the Orthodox Church as a deacon and came to the stage at a young age to become a well-known songwriter, actor, director, and choreographer.

but not out of a desire to flirt with and fondle men (“Komaritua Tewanay” 26). She said that if she had had that kind of sexual desire, she would have done it without opening a bar business. The well-known artist Aselefech Ashine had already told a national newspaper, *Addis Zemen* that “If I were to be paid enough salary, I would immediately quit this work and lead the rest of my life as a performer” (Ibid). Another popular performer of the day who had a bar in one of the hotspots of Addis Ababa also said to *Menen*, “I know that there is much suffering in the business of vending alcohol. However, whenever I think of my future life, I see that I would be pushed into the sea. So, would there be someone who stands against me when I am struggling not to fall into the sea?” (Ibid).

The ways in which the actresses used their access to journalists in their cabarets showed the complex and creative plotting of their dramaturgy. The manner in which they critiqued the theatre administration in public debate revealed how the latter’s rationalization was already fractured despite its ambition to create a binary between diurnal and nocturnal lives, ethical and profane spaces. What is equally important is the fact that the female performers conducted a series of discussions and developed plots at their cabarets that were presented as spaces of degeneracy, excessive alcohol, and prostitution. The cabarets were marked as sources of moral scandal, for which the theatres held the female performers accountable. The actresses, on the other hand, used their cabarets as spaces of political activism by way of avoiding the gaze of the state-owned theatres. This reveals the messiness of the binary between the theatres as spaces

where Christian morality was preached and the cabarets that were marked as sites of profanity.⁵³

In addition to this kind of public engagement, the female performers continued to participate in the clandestine activism that aimed at overthrowing Captain Atnafu's group. Many of the actresses raised ideas, provided space and refreshment at their cabarets and financed the whole logistics. Leaflets explaining their conditions as artists in general, and the status of the employees of the theatre in particular, were prepared. The female performers also played a large role in working with the cleaners and ushers of the theatre to covertly disseminate the leaflets. Given that their boss was in the "opponents" camp, enlisting the ushers needed a careful approach. Taking cues from the lighting technicians who were involved in the collaboration, the cleaners and the ushers waited until the lights went down and used the dark auditorium to scatter the pamphlets across the floor. The leaflets secretly transported the messages to the rest of the employees and the external public (audiences of the theatre), and more importantly to the administrators, particularly to Captain Atnafu Mekonnen.

Telela Kebede and Getachew Debalqe, the two artists who primarily choreographed the dramaturgy, recalled the event. The collective dramaturgy demanded everyone be performative in a sense that all involved had to act as if they were organizing a festive party. The organizers invited all the employees of Haile Selassie I theatre to a

⁵³ During the Haile Selassie's time, many plays focused on Christian moral teachings as the state was married to the Orthodox Christian Church, which was considered to have 1/3 of the state's power symbolically (anointing/giving legitimacy to the king of kings) and in property ownership (through land grants). Besides, almost all of the playwrights and some of the performers had Orthodox Church backgrounds. Except for a few instances, all the performers were affiliated to Christianity and they came from various parts of northern Ethiopia, whose powerful elites dominated the national political field. Yet, notwithstanding their cultural and religious affinity with the official narratives and practices, the performers were highly marginalized as members of the cast group *azmari*.

‘get-together party’ that would be held in the *foyer*. The script of the dramaturgy, whose subtext is political, was that the theatre department would like to organize a social gathering. The subtext of that script was political. All the performers had to enact imaginatively navigating the tension between the text and subtext. Since the dramaturgy did not accord hierarchy between scripted text and embodied knowledge, literal writing and reading did not gain higher value, unlike the traditional aesthetic that governed Haile Selassie I Theatre’s stage. The clandestine creative protestors read one another’s body, one another’s gestures, and communicated in a game like interaction through role-playing. The stage actors cooperated with workers at the theatre’s café, the cleaners, and the ushers to arrange the seats and the tables properly as if they were about to throw a feast. The technicians checked the microphone and stereo set for sound quality pretending that they knew was only the celebration. They made sure that the room had ample light. Stage crew set a platform pulling and pushing the rostrums. A few seats were reserved next to the rostrum as if the organizers expected guests of ‘honor.’

Though there was a visible tension in the theatre due to the pamphlets distributed in the theatre and despite the fact that many employees realized that something was brewing, the real intention of the party became known to all only when a speaker came to the stage and read a manifesto. Outlining the miseries suffered by the employees of the theatre in general and of the artists in particular, the speaker re-enacted the embodied history of his colleagues at the theatres. The speaker calmly elaborated what the director had been doing to them, his patron-client relations and partisanship based on ethnic or

provincial identity, his unprofessional administration, and the employees' wretched condition.

The actions unfolded before assorted audiences. It mainly targeted Captain Atnafu Mekonnen and his clique, though it also addressed those employees who did not join the protest. While uneasiness ran across the oppressive administration, those employees who had been waiting for such a moment were highly motivated. Seeing how almost all of the employees felt enraged by the oppression they had to endure, the actor at the stage boldly said, "from now on, Captain Atnafu is ousted." Waiting for this cue, Telela Kebede invited the highly reputed and much-respected Armenian music composer Nersis Nalbandian to open the champagne she brought. The laughter that surged from the performers and the crowd did not echo on the side of Captain Atnafu and his group.

The ways in which the employees and the actors utilized tactics to resist and subvert strategic power was vital. Ministers, vice ministers, and directors were known in the history of Ethiopian theatre for making the lives of the performers continuously precarious. Even though the actors had always tried to find ways to negotiate the patriarchal theatre administration by even appealing to Emperor Haile Selassie, the ministers who led the theatres were impudent enough to expel the actors en masse ("Kebede Wolde Giorgis").⁵⁴ Their action against Captain Atnafu in the last months of Haile Selassie's rule paved a way for them to organize themselves and pose fundamental exigencies. Yet the similar moral economy that Tsegaye cited in the post-revolution does not only conceal the female performers suffering and struggle against the disciplinary

⁵⁴ In this letter, 43 artists petitioned to regain their previous positions at Love of the Country theatre.

mechanisms of Haile Selassie's empire but also the actors' fight that brought Tsegaye to power.

The Political in Precarious Embodied Actions

What Savigliano calls subversive reproduction seems a paradoxical concept since it relates subversion with the reproduction of stereotypes or participation in the reproduction of relations/system of domination. On the one hand, there is a constant postcolonial desire of the female performers to change their positions in the society. On the other, the marginality of these women obliges them to slip into the system that they unsettle from within. The discoveries that the female performers make in their journey in rugged terrains continue despite the slippage and precariousness of their struggle. As Savigliano reminds us, this is not an easy endeavor. Yet attending to the continuous tactics of survival that the female performers enact, I argue, reveals the political in their actions. Put differently, tracking the constant walks and detours of the female performers helps us see the dialectical relations between the seemingly estranged secular socialist temporality and the era of Haile Selassie's theocratic monarchy. It mainly allows us to look at the precarity of the binary between the theatre as a sacred-center and the cabaret as a peripheral-profane space.

Passing through various conflicts in time (from Haile Selassie's time to the socialist revolutionary time), female performers allow us to see how the seemingly secular socialist progressive project re-inscribed the religious moral code of a theocratic monarchy. Taking place in the fluid boundaries within and between the theatres and the cabarets, the female performers' embodied actions also help expose the spatial order that

the state-owned theatres sustained and imposed, in spite of (and due to) their attempts to reduce space into time.

Though the workers at the theatres were able to overthrow the previous administration, particularly Captain Atnafu, the systemic problems remained to trouble their lives. Using another tactic to meet and pose their demands to Prime Minister Endalkachew, some performers and journalists collaborated to persuade the last bourgeoisie cabinet to assign Ahadu Sabure, who they deemed a “fair-minded” journalist and diplomat, as the Minister of Information.

Telela Kebede, who was one of the members of the group that approached the prime minister, discussed with me about the tactic they used:

After we studied his schedule, we went to the residence of the prime minister and waited at the nearby Bel Air Hotel until he came back from his office. We surrounded his car as soon as he arrived at the main gate before his chauffeur drove him inside. He asked us what our demands were. We told him that we wanted Ahadu Sabure to be our new minister.

He answered that our demands would be met.

Building on that tactic, on March 29, 1974, representatives of the performers of the Haile Selassie I and Patriotic Association theatres presented the following demands to minister Ahadu Sabure:

We want to know about the position that we should have in the country;

We want to have a new director who has a deeper understanding of theatre

arts; We want to see a new civil code that would set the minimum and

maximum salary scales; There should also be a salary increase, retirement security, and (50 %) health care coverage, royalty payment, overtime pay, annual leave, and maternity leave; A music and drama school should be established so as to train artists who would follow in the footsteps of the existing [mostly self-made] performers; We would like to get scholarships to equip ourselves with better knowledge. (“Performers of Haile Selassie” 1 & 6)

The first demand spoke of the systemic problem that denied their dignity as artists and as citizens. They protested against their marginalized *azmari* position as they asked for acknowledgment or inclusion as civil servants so as to get the benefits of their work or the right to establish an independent association. They were calling for a fundamental change in the productions of relations as well as the system at large.⁵⁵ The second demand of the performers was to get Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin assigned as the director of their theatre. Tsegaye had worked at the Haile Selassie I Theatre producing critical social and political dramas such as *Yekermo Sew* (Man of Tomorrow) until he resigned due to censorship and systemic problems in the theatre’s administration. The artists knew that Tsegaye was not a critical playwright and director but also a person who suffered from the systemic injustices like they did. In view of this, they particularly demanded Minister Ahadu Sabure to appoint Tsegaye as their director. Though he was not able to answer the other fundamental demands the actors presented, Ahadu Sabure succeeded in letting

⁵⁵ This was beyond the minister’s power; the cabinet that was constituted by bourgeoisie elites of Haile Selassie’s regime, although some might seem ‘progressive’ in its liberal sense, and even beyond the system itself.

Prime Minister Endalkachew appoint a person with “mature artistic sensibility,”

Tsegaye, as the director of the Haile Selassie I theatre.⁵⁶

Seeing the ways in which these interventions resonated with their lived experiences, all the female performers acknowledged Tsegaye’s critical views and theatrical expressions. Yet, the paradoxes in his theorization and staging of critical views and his oppressive acts against the female performers manifested themselves in his re-inscription of naming, fixing, and managing the female performers’ bodies as “prostitutes.”

Characters and Actors: Socialist Role Playing, The Female Bodies’ Labor

The national theatre’s socialist mission was crafted by highlighting the roles the theatre and its artists should play. Tsegaye said the following in his letter to Telela Kebede: “[T]oday, in this time of freedom and cultural renaissance [revolution], if artists do not refrain from indulging themselves in a defiled lifestyle, *criticizing, correcting, teaching and inspiring people* would be incongruous” (“Dismissal Letter,” my emphasis). On the other hand, reflecting back on this cultural inter/national mission, Telela examines her and the rest of the performers’ conditions in their relation to the theatre. She said: “The theatre wanted only our artistic skills but not us as persons.”⁵⁷ Telela wondered whether her personhood mattered instead of the role she played for the theatre.

This clearly indicates the tension between the socialist inventions of the modern subject as a role player, rather than what Derrida calls the “unique person whose secret

⁵⁶ Tsegaye had resigned from the Haile Selassie I theatre due to administrative and political (censorship) problems. He had worked with the performers who fought to bring him back to the stage and to the theatre’s administration.

⁵⁷ Telela said these words to me reflecting back on Tsegaye’s words when I read the letter to her.

remains hidden behind the social mask” (Derrida 37). Showing how the idea of bourgeois equality insinuates its notion of roleplaying even in socialist theories that supposedly give primacy for collectivism, Jacques Derrida argues “The alternatives are confused: individualism becomes socialism or collectivism, it simulates an ethics or politics of singularity; liberalism joins socialism, democracy joins totalitarianism. [...] Equality for all [...] becomes the objective or quantifiable equality of roles, not of persons” (Ibid). This is akin to what Spivak calls reproductive heteronormativity. Capitalist reproductions and oppressive gendered and sexed norms prevail.

In order to corroborate these itineraries, I will discuss Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin’s first ‘revolutionary’ play, *ABC* in relation to the female actresses’ lived experience and their participation in the revolution (in theatre productions and other political activities). In the below excerpt taken from *Ha Hu Be’sidist Wor* [ABC in Six Months], the characters Gene and *Gira Geta* Gadu are involved in an altercation.⁵⁸ Gene is a professional wailer who is hired by people for funeral processions. Her oral performance is needed to make families and friends mourn their dead with a deeper passion.

Gadu is an itinerant clergy who broke a religious rule and was expelled from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He is a friend of Gene’s husband, a sergeant who went far afield to “protect his country” (*Ha Hu*). Yet, he sleeps around with Gene. Because she cannot afford the house rent, for which she and her husband did not pay for so long, she is obliged to also sleep with Tidu, the ‘insane-like Afro-skirt-chaser’ who came from the

⁵⁸ *Gira Geta* is a title given to a higher clergyman in an Orthodox Church. Yet Gadu is depicted as former clergy who is found to be corrupt though he still acts as a priest in the everyday life.

US. He is a journalist who profits from Gene's labor in the name of 'promoting' her art of wailing by recording the funeral dirges of Gene. Gene and Gadu are in disagreement:

Gene: You slept with me the year before last and I got pregnant for you. You ridiculed me saying, "Where did you get this creature from?" while I was running here and there to abort and get cleaned. You better stop that! The person you named 'afro-skirt-chaser' gave me his words to record my funeral dirges and publish an album so that I would be relieved of the house rent payments. For that reason, I told him that I would sleep over the matter. You know that I am not in a position to disappoint the son of the landlord before my sergeant husband comes back. So, I don't understand you begrudging me this, *Lead-Priest*.

Gira Geta [Gadu]: Do you want me to collide head-on with this drug addict modern demon?! I cannot even appease the local demon that embodied your son. [...] Let alone his spirit, he himself is a strong person who has built strong ties with powerful relations. He dislodged me from your love and from being an agent of the house rent. Alas! Go with him, or let him go with you. (Tsegaye *Ha Hu* 24-25)

The former-priest used to be the agent of the house rent. Yet, he is in a state of anxiety because Tidu is taking his position and privilege away. Tidu represents what Tsegaye calls ethnocentric [Eurocentric] elites who came from the US and Europe (active members of the student associations) to take part in the struggle for power. It needs to be

noted that local groups, who study Marxist literature in underground circles, merged with political activists whose leadership flew from Europe and the US for Ethiopia in 1974 (EPRP) and in 1975 (Mei'son). In his theory and plays, Tsegaye incessantly critiqued these groups for being alienated from their country's reality, knowledge system and language. The character *Gira Geta* Gadu represents the Church that was losing its power. Until this time, the Ethiopian state had been married to the Orthodox Church that shared one-third of power in the empire (Tadesse). Showing the altercation between Tidu and Gadu, the playwright is directly speaking to the revolutionary moment using various theatrical metaphors. Gadu has been sleeping with Gene, the professional mourner until the journalist Tidu came and "took her away." Hence, the professional wailer Gene metaphorically and metonymically represents an abstract idea of misery and the miserable Ethiopia(ns) who have been wailing due to their age-old wretchedness.

In performing this character, Telela embodies an abstract idea of wailing and experiences of suffering. As a "socialist role player," Telela participated in exposing the wretchedness of the people. She also suffered from the evils of the ancient regime as a member of the outcast group of *azmaris*, as part of the oppressed workers/artists of the state-owned theatre, and as a gendered and sexualized Ethiopian woman. As Gene negotiates the tight space she inhabits in a patriarchal space, Telela traversed various tense time-spaces fighting within and against the displacement imposed by the theatre administration during the revolution as well as in Haile Selassie's time. Whenever there is a chance offering, Gene seizes it and makes the best of it. She confronts Gadu (the former priest) measuring that he was losing his previous stronger power. Telela

participated in the dramaturgy and poetic protests to demonstrate against the former administration, presented her demands to Haile Selassie's last Prime Minister, and later posed half a dozen of questions to the minister of the Ministry of Information along with her female and male colleagues. Telela participated in the 'revolutionary' theatre production, *Ha Hu* but protested against the playwright who wrote this play. Ironically, though, Tsegaye fixed associated her body with what he termed the defiled Haile Selassie's rule.

However, Telela traveled in spaces of becoming rather than being fixed as a gendered-sexualized-classed-raced being. The character that she played in *Ha Hu*, Gene, is a professional wailer, an artist, a parent, a wife, a mistress, and at times a person who involves herself in sexual affairs for which she gets paid. Likewise, Telela was an activist demanding her right, leading her family, parenting her children, and running a cabaret where she acted as the head of her pub, cashier, singer, cook, friend, and *lover*. Even though she may receive money when she had a sexual affair with some people, she considered it as a gift, and not as a payment for sex work. She told me that a person, who dared to say that he slept with her in public, would not have the chance to 'see' her again. The other performers of the state-owned theatres who worked at their or their friends' cabarets as hostesses, cashiers, singers, and dancers, prefer to use the term *lovers* (*wodajoch*) to 'clients' when it comes to their sexual relations with men. This avoidance of the term *setegna adari* ("prostitute"), which Tsegaye used to mark their bodies, did not imply a sexual work but utter disparagement. The state attached the name to sinful and criminal acts. Tsegaye also considered it as space of defilement than understanding the

condition of the women in historical material ways as he tried to understand the issues of race, ethnicity, and religion. Tsegaye and his administration, like the state in general, singled out female bodies as “prostitutes” without saying anything about and exempting male prostitution. They even named a performer “prostitute” while she was not involved in any sexual work at the nightclubs except performing for the clients. Even though Tsegaye also banned male performers from working in nightclubs, they were not called “prostitutes.”

Tsegaye’s conception of the human, in which he mostly used the term Man even when he attempted to deconstruct the Eurocentered Man and reinvent a new personality, failed to consider how imperialism, neocolonialism, and capitalism were gendered and sexed. Hence, the pushback on the part of Telela and her female colleagues also speaks to such complex power relations in the formation of discourses and marking of bodies. Most of the female performers explained that they did not prefer to be in red light districts if they had been paid enough salary. In calling the payment that they receive from their clients a “gift,” the female performer-sexual workers seem to distance themselves from the official body marker of sexualized and commodified bodies. Yet, since the space of sexual work puts so much pressure on bodies who are involved in the trade, what Savigliano calls subversive reproduction always intervenes in the relations thereof. In other words, the invocation of “gift” in this context reproduces sexualization and commodification of female bodies. However, it is from within this very slippery space that sexualized, gendered, and commodified bodies were obliged to launch an attack on male domination.

“We are in a double bind with reproductive heteronormativity,” as Spivak would have it. Tsegaye made it possible for Telela to expose the challenges she had to negotiate, resist and subvert through enacting one of the main characters, Gene. Nevertheless, the fact that Tsegaye measured Telela’s participation in terms of “role-playing” made his theorization and staging of the sexualized and commodified bodies’ experience inadequate. While Tsegaye synecdochized marginalized women through Gene (the character), Telela’s lived experience as an actor and as a person gets lost in translation/representation. Paradoxically enough, the national theatre denied the role that Telela played in the revolution and marked her body as “impure.” Despite its acknowledgment for particular and universal differences through symbolism and metonymy, Tsegaye’s play, *ABC* masks the individual actor’s suffering and desire. Gayatri Spivak notes that attending to or denying difference cannot be a solution unless one has to “find out what inequality brings about its use and who can deny it on occasion.” Being informed by historical material relations, this hierarchy reproduces and invents inequality.

Tsegaye as a playwright and the national theatre as an institution made a profit by re-inventing and making use of the “abject” bodies as surplus labor. Following Max Weber’s idea of rationalization as a “process of interpellation,” Roderick A. Ferguson states that labor can be taken as one institution wherein “rationalizing functions” are enacted (83). Juxtaposing it with sexuality, Weber argues, “[Labor] is ... the specific defense against all those temptations [to] the unclean life.” Having also an extensive engagement with Karl Marx, yet speaking to the inadequacies in both theories of labor,

Ferguson complicated the reproduction of surplus labor in view of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Ferguson writes:

As surplus labor becomes the impetus for anxieties about the sanctity of “community,” “family,” and “nation,” it reveals the ways in which these categories are normalized in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Indeed, the production of labor, ultimately, throws the normative boundaries of race, gender, class, and sexuality into confusion.

(*Aberrations* 17)

The venerable state-sanctioned moral code marked Ethiopian women as “*zimut adariwoch*” (women who live from adultery/sexual work). On the other hand, the rise of internal migration and urban poverty created more anxiety on the part of the state as the condition “thr[e]w the normative boundaries of race, gender, class, and sexuality into confusion” to borrow Ferguson's words. Marking her as “unclean,” the Ethiopian national theatre made Telela Kebede disposable while it exploited her classed-sexed-gendered (surplus) labor. Let us examine this scene from *Ha Hu*.

The journalist, Tidu, puts one dollar as a disbursement for her performance of funeral dirges and as a payment for having sex with her:

Tidu: [After a very brief pause, he immediately turns towards *Gene* and takes a one dollar note from his pocket.]

Gene: For what ... What is that?

Tidu: Payment for your work. Price for the art, for the wailing, for the funeral dirge recording. When the love relation ends, there comes the price

of business and labor. It will be deducted from the price that you should pay for my uncle's piled bed rental when your sergeant husband comes back. Isn't it a fact that everybody is a laborer who sweats, judders, and moves up and down as our mother did it [when she lived as a prostitute]?

(*Ha Hu* 38)

The play staged prostitution as a national labor in which the country indulged itself. Gene also slipped into it although her major source of livelihood was the performance of wailing. Tidu records the talent of the professional mourner 'promoting' her as an artist through print and electronic media. Yet, he does not pay her well. He lives on selling her (the people's) grief, tears. He also sleeps with her and says sarcastically that her sexual labor 'deserves' a payment for she "sweats, judders, and moves up and down" as 'his' (whom he refers to as 'our') mother did it before. In another monologue, he mentions that "our mother" used to be "*set adari*" (which means, in this context, 'sex worker').

While the national theatre in general and the playwright-administrator, in particular, gained large profit out of the successive theatrical productions, the female artists did not get enough pay for the role they played. The theatre exploited their labor while it staged a "revolutionary" theatre that also talked about the exploitation of women. The state-owned theatres have been making the male and female performers' labor redundant by making use of the age-old casteism that stigmatized *azmariwoch* (minstrels). Minstrels used to roam around to drink houses and/or feudal lords to get their daily bread as a gift. They lived at the mercy of individual lords and the people. With the emergence of its modern theatres, the state substituted the traditional patronage.

However, despite their permanent position at the theatres, the performers did not get their salaries regularly or they would not be paid at all. The stigma of minstrelsy is deep rooted to an extent that its violence is still felt.

Being part of the global-local and internal historical material relations, most of the Ethiopian female performers came from the countryside fleeing the patriarchal violence as some of them suffered from urban poverty. Hence, coupled with the existing caste based marginalization, the gendered, sexed, and classed relations complicate the position of female performers and make them part of the national surplus labor. For example, with the high influx of people to Addis Ababa due to internal migration and for the high degree of urban poverty, in the eve of the 1974 revolution, the highest percentage of “formal” female employment came from “Service, Sport and Recreation” (Laketch 91-101). According to Laketch Dirasse, in 1967, this sector employed 34,630 male and female workers of which 27,273 (53.5 %) were women. Lakecth states that “It is likely that most of this category are bar consorts working out of the big bars and hotels” (92). In fact, 80,000 women were involved in sex work in the 1970s (75).

Artist Alganesh Tariku was one of the female performers who came from the countryside. She fled early marriage and came to Addis Ababa. In 1966, the Haile Selassie I (National) theatre recruited her from a nightclub where she performed as a dancer-sexual worker. In two months, she studied some ethnic dances and represented Ethiopia together with other women at the First World Black Arts Festival in Dakar, Senegal. When the national theatre ordered her to close her cabaret, Alganesh wrote a

letter to the national theatre on November 4, 1975, to ask how the national theatre perceived her movement between the theatre and her bar as something “incongruous”:

The fact that I was considered fit and selected to participate in [international performance] tours shows how I fully committed myself to my duties as an artist. [...] I did not disrupt my profession at all by adding and running another business. I was advancing my artistic career and have been part of Ethiopia’s cultural delegations sent to various countries. [I] delivered what was expected of me [and] did not create any inconvenience in the theatre by being lazy or absent due to my bar business. (“Alganesh to National”)

While the state cultural centers theorized her body as an impure space through which excessive fluids sexuality would pour into the “stage-temple,” Alganesh presented her cabaret as a space where she conducted business. In so doing, she defied the homogenization of time and space imposed by the theatre. She also questioned the notion of “role-playing” by showing how she has been effectively handling her personal business without hampering the role of representing her country as a dedicated cultural delegate.

Artist Alganesh and Telela Kebede also exposed how their involvement in the cabaret business was entangled with their condition at the theatre. Alganesh argued: “I have not been groomed to grow as an actor but given trivial roles [and] my morale has been crushed because it compels me to refrain from the art.” Likewise, Telela held the National Theatre accountable for her participation in the bar business. She argued in her

letter that she “did not want to pursue a drinking establishment but it was the leadership of the theatre that forced” her to opt to this life. By that, she meant that her life has its own history that was part of Haile Selassie I Theatre’s history. Due to her confrontations with her male bosses, the theatre had ordered her to become a ‘wedding singer’ accompanying the national theatre’s band who would perform in the weddings of the aristocrats (“Letter to Wodajeneh”; Hailu 7). She was intentionally alienated from the regular performances in the theatre. In our conversation, artist Telela mentioned that she used the weddings to promote herself and persuade people to be customers of her bar.

While engendering tactics to move in the above-mentioned interstitial spaces of power in their every day/every-night life, the female artists interrogated the structural problems that stifled their daily lives. After a repeated attempt to address their challenges to various authorities, they made it clear that the officials of the theatre kept on saying that their drinking house business “conflicted with [their] profession *without seeking a solution to [their] problems*” (“Telela and Alganesh,” my emphasis). This is a very important move in terms of exposing the inadequacy of theorization and staging of Ethiopian socialism. Tsegaye opened up theoretical and practical possibilities using the road that the performers paved.

On the other hand, the incongruity between Tsegaye’s staging of Gene’s national sexual labor in a critical way and the exclusion of the very actress who played that character, dispossession of Telela’s body reveals the patriarchal power from which Tsegaye benefited as a male revolutionary artist-intellectual even by exploiting the female performers’ labor whom he poignantly marked as scandalous non-workers. This

irony shows how the new administration at the ministry of culture and the attendant revolutionary movement in the theatre arts did not consider the fundamental demands the women artists presented at the outset. Whereas the female performers were saying, to borrow Spivak's terms, the theatre should not ban our business in the name of socialist freedom "without laying the groundwork for this (political) will" (438).

Using the Cracks, Another Blow: Revolutionary Protest against a Revolutionary

Who are we? Who are we?

Deprived of our rights on our land

Who are we? Who are we?⁵⁹

On April 22, 1976, staff members of the National Theatre were chanting the above slogans while they marched from their premises up to the municipality on one of the city's well-known avenues – Churchill Road. The itinerary of the protest was to go to the municipality and call upon the artists of the City Hall to join the protest. Then they would be moving across the center of the city and summon the artists from the first professional theatre, Love of the Country to ultimately march towards the *Arat Kilo* Square, particularly to the palace which the Provisional Military Administration used as its headquarter. Traversing the major avenues of the city, the performers and other staff members of the national theatre were not just articulating their questions of subjectivities in public spaces by asking, "who are we?" but they were also claiming those very spaces as subjects. Aside from the music marches they used to do in these roads to attract audiences and apart from their everyday individual negotiation of public spaces, this was

⁵⁹ Interview with Askale Amenshewa, Telela Kebede, and Alganesh Tariku.

the first time that artists organized their questions with such bigger presence in the public space.

Both the date (22 April 1976) and the constellation of events around the revolution made this particular demonstration decisive for various parties. The artists who could not reap the fruits of the revolution despite their struggle considered this protest as a vital showdown. The female artists, in particular, were determined to make the best out of this demonstration because the revolutionary male figures, particularly Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin posed challenges citing from and sustaining the sexed-gendered-classed moral code of the ancient regime. However, these female performers had to collaborate with other male colleagues and use every opportune moment as they travel in the interstices of various conflicting forces.

The protest took place in the morrow of the declaration of the National Democratic Revolutionary Programme of Ethiopia (NDRPE), which was formulated by the civilian-military political pact, the main actors being members of Mei'son.⁶⁰ This particular protest was the first to be staged after the declaration of NDRPE and the office that would execute the program was established by law on April 21, 1976 (Andargachew A. 292).⁶¹ Since the artists' protest began securing permission from the provisional

⁶⁰ The program was drafted by members of the People's Organizing Political Committee: Haile Fida (Chairman), Negede Gobeze, Fikre Merid, Wond-Wosen Hailu, Mesfin Kassu, Alemu Abebe, Bezabih Maru, Nigust Adane, Andargachew Asegid [those who came from Mei'son], Senay Likke [chairperson of Wez-League], Yonas Admassu (from EPRP despite the meta-narrative that EPRP never attempted to work with the military and other civilian leftist groups), Tesfaye Shewaye, Melese Ayalew, Eshetu Chole and Asefa Medhane (Independent Marxist). The People's Organizing Political Committee (whose six members came from the military while *Lij* Michael Imiru was a progressive member of the old aristocracy who served as a political adviser of the military council) and the *Derg*, in general, approved the NDRPE (Andargachew T.156-172).

⁶¹ In this declaration, the *Derg*, unlike its former programs of "Ethiopia first" and "Ethiopian socialism," detailed its programs on democratic rights, self-determination [excluding secession] for nations and

military government, it would be one proof for the execution of the new political program on the part of the civilian-military pact. Besides, it was three months ago that the military government issues series of declarations and one of them was the law of workers' affairs declared on December 6, 1975. This proclamation states that workers have the right to form unions in so far as their number is twenty and above.⁶² For one of the demands that the artists posed was establishing their union, the protest was one platform wherein the government could show that it was not threatened by but ready to speak to the question of enshrining and guaranteeing political rights.

On the other hand, the other bigger political group, EPRP did not want to openly collaborate with the *Derg* but opted to fight forcefully against any force to take state power under its in/famous slogan, "The People's Provisional Government, Now!" By this time, EPRP seemed alienated save thousands of its vigilant and enthusiastic members on whom its leadership prided. For the rest of the political parties forged an alliance under the umbrella – Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs (POMOA). While it was, at the same time, creating alliances and infiltrating into various opposing political spaces such as the *Derg* (from causing various troubles within to staging coup d'état), other civilian left groups, and the Ethiopian Women's Coordinating Committee. In spite of its call for People's Provisional Government in which various political forces could participate, EPRP considered itself as the *de facto* vanguard of the revolution

nationalities, organization of political parties, groups and fronts in the fight against "anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, and anti- bureaucratic-capitalist forces."

⁶² On December 5, 1975, eighteen members of Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Union were released; On the same day, the state of emergency was lifted and more than 100 intellectuals and twenty-six leaders of labor unions were released from prison; On December 14, 1975, a proclamation of consolidation of peasant association was declared; On December 18, 1975, the students who did not participate in the national campaign program were pardoned. See Andargachew A. 299.

believing that it won the proletariats particularly the youth support across the country. In fact, the idea of the vanguard informed the ways in which all galvanized their support and fought against each other. EPRP named the *Derg*, particularly the party formed by members of the *Derg* under the banner, *Abyotawi Sadad* [Revolutionary Flame], “the chosen officers” and “fascists” while it called all the civilian leftists who came together under POMOA (*Mei’son, Ichat [Ethiopian Oppressed People’s Revolutionary struggle], Wez-League [The Workers’ League], and Malerid [Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary struggle]*) who overtly collaborated with the military council “*bandas*” (sellouts).

At that particular juncture, the confrontations between these differing fronts were getting intense as the intra-group tensions were bubbling in the respective parties. At the same time, the military conflict in Eritrea was escalating and the secessionist movement became one of the important factors that informed how Ethiopian political groups formulated the ethno/national and postcolonial questions. The confrontation with Eritrean fighting groups also animated how Ethiopian political groups collaborated with or rallied against the Eritrean secessionists. For instance, EPRP and the Tigrean People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) were seeking/fighting for military assistance from groups in Eritrea while it was evident that the civilian-military pacts negotiated with and/or stood against Eritrean groups (Andargachew T.; Tegbaru). In view of these complex scenarios, EPRP was about to use the protest that the artists staged at least for two purposes. One, it could discredit the civilian-military pact and its New Program as a failure. Two, it could advance its political agendas through this particular protest.

According to Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, some artists were working for EPRP.

Despite his intention to replace senior performers like Telela Kebede with the younger ones such as Alemtsehay Wodajo, almost all the female performers were rallying against Tsegaye. There were, indeed, members of EPRP from both senior and junior performers before and after the April 22nd protest. However, it was none other than Alemtsehay Wodajo that Tsegaye marked as the mastermind behind the protest that took place on April 22, 1975. Alemtsehay told me that she was aware how Tsegaye still named her unruly person while he groomed her as a promising actress. When Telela Kebede refused to play the character, Gene in *ABC in Six Months*, Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin recruited Alemtsehay from the new school of theatre arts at the national theatre to substitute the role. However, the senior male and female artists, who considered their acts as a sign of solidarity with Telela Kebede, bullied Alemtsehay Wodajo who went to the extent of fleeing from backstage. Going to her home, Tsegaye beseeched Alemtsehay. Given that Tsegaye participated in re/producing the condition that sustained the heteropatriarchal power, both Telela and Alemtsehay stood against the injustices despite the tensions existed between them. That condition also made those female performers to confront and seniority and the already established alliance posed challenge to Alemtsehay. “He used to call me ‘ANTE’ [you, with male gender identity] because I used to tell him upfront that he was only good for the stage but not for administration.” In most of the conversations I had with Alemtsehay, she wanted to underline that she was not a member of EPRP but just a sympathizer.

Reading the political activities in which Alemtsehay was involved, one could see how her non/membership would not matter not only because of EPRP's pamphlets that she used to disseminate amongst the artists but also due to her involvement in feminist political acts in the Ethiopian Women's Coordinating Committee which was later occupied by EPRP members and sympathizers. Elite women coming from EPRP and Mei'son formed this committee envisioning a national women's association. Closely observing the wider participation of women in the revolution, this committee invited more than three hundred sixty women "from among factory workers, sex workers, housewives, teachers, businesswomen, civil servants and students" (Hiwot 131). Artists of Love of the Country theatre elected Aselefech Ashine as the representative of female performers at the two-week seminar that the Women's Coordinating Committee organized. Despite the fact that the Ministry of Culture marked Aselefech as an "impure body" who was stifling the "socialist progress [due to her] involvement in part-time scandalous prostitution," she represented her female colleagues in the national radical political space. Aselefech shared her ideas with me saying that her "understanding of the politics of labor unions" became critical in the discussions that she had with "radical leaders of Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions" at her cabaret. She later became a member of Wez-League political party. However, Aselefech and her colleagues at Love of the Country theatre did not participate in the protest organized by workers from the national theatre.

After she participated in the above-mentioned seminar together with Aselefech Ashine representing the National Theatre, Alemtsehay Wodajo became one of the

twenty-five newly elected members of the Ethiopian Women's Coordinating Committee. Alemtsehay wrote revolutionary lyrics that became widely popular, organized national symposiums, revolutionary holidays such as March 8 (when it was celebrated for the first time in Ethiopia, for instance), staged performances with other female performers at the national theatre, participated in international conferences and trainings and gave public speeches in various factories and other spaces.⁶³ Alemtsehay became one of the important figures of the Ethiopian Women's Coordinating Committee. In her political activities, Alemtsehay used her lyrics such as "*Guad Ehit Tenesh*" (Sister-Comrade, Rise Up) to reveal *dirb dirbirib chikona* (piles and piles of oppressions) that women had to shoulder in Ethiopia (Aleme 116-117). Even though there was tension between the younger and senior female performers, as the latter viewed the former as instruments deployed by Tsegaye in his attempt to "dispose" of them anytime, the young Alemtsehay confronted Tsegaye because he did not allow the performers to establish their union. She attended the rehearsal of the protest the previous day although she could not make it to the demonstration on April 22, 1975, because her grandmother died.

Backing up and working with young male and female actors who were organizing the protest, the other female performers, including those Tsegaye had already dismissed (Telela Kebede and Abebech Hailemichael), joined the clandestine dramaturgy of demonstration. They convened at night in the houses of certain actors. Words spread

⁶³ A conversation I had with Alemtsehay Wodajo. She has lived in the US for more than two decades and we have had conversations for seven years now. See also "Letter from Colonel Atnafu Abate" to the National Theatre. Colonel Atnafu Abate was the second Deputy Chairperson of the Provisional Military Administration Council. He wrote the letter on behalf of the Ethiopian Women's Coordinating Committee (EWCC) who wanted Alemtsehay Wodajo to give a political speech in various organizations and factories for six months on the weekends. See also "Letter from the Ethiopian Women's Coordinating Committee" to the National Theatre. In this letter, EWCC nominated Alemtsehay to go to USSR to participate in an international meeting.

covertly. The female performers raised ideas and helped in filing their cases at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Interior, and the national security office (*hizb dehninet*). After struggling in these battlefields, the artists had designed their internal constitution and bylaws that they submitted to government offices to form their union. Despite the promise they received from the government that they would get their license sooner, they found out that they were allowed neither to establish a union nor to become a civil servant because the government did not know how to treat their case (“Ke’Tiriw Wedih”). This became the immediate cause for the workers of the national theatre to stage their demonstration on April 22, 1975. They shouted their political slogans:

“Art for the People’s Struggle!”

“Art Does Not Have a Pop!”

“Art Does Not Emanate from a Bureau but from the People!”

Responding to the solidarity call that came from the workers’ of the national theatre, fellow artists from the City Hall joined the chanting of the slogans. For some of the City Hall artists, it is a solidarity march.⁶⁴ For others, the demonstration called by the National Theatre artists had far-reaching political implications. The protest was a space where anti-*Derg* messages would be sent. The same was true for Artists and staff members of the National Theatre. Whereas many protested to unseat Tsegaye from his directorship and push their demands that they formulated since February 1974, there were others who clandestinely used the demonstration to advance also political questions of EPRP.

Inhabiting such overlapping and fissured space, artists of the National and City Hall

⁶⁴ As members of the municipality, artists at City Hall participated in throwing rubbish in the streets of Addis and some of their basic demands were met. Surafel “Stage and State.”

theatres moved in front of Love of the Country Theatre expecting its artists to ‘unite’ with them. None but one male artist dared to chant the song with them. While some looked at the protesters through the glass door, the rest of the performers were busy at rehearsal. Viewed in relation to the City Hall’s response, the silence on the part of Love of the Country Theatre indicates that the idea and practice of solidarity were fragile, and has a particular historicity. The situation begs a lot of questions, though.

The fragmentary stories, the continued political tensions among individuals due to their different new political alliances and the deliberate distortions of stories including selective forgetting make one’s attempt to discern the confrontation incomplete. Yet it can be said that political plotting can be one possible scenario. Even if Tsegaye was a higher official who made decisions that affected both all state-owned theatres, the organizers of the protest did not invite artists of the Love of the Country Theatre. On the other hand, performers at the City Hall received an invitation from the National Theatre albeit they were under the Municipality’s administration and some of their demands were already met after they protested and ousted the Mayor.

So, why did not organizers of the protest at the National Theatre send an invitation to performers of the Love of the Country Theatre? Some people say that the organizers believed that an artist, who had a higher position at Love of the Country Theatre and a close colleague of Tsegaye, might deter a support from performers at his theatre. Why did not then the artists come out by themselves and join the performers of the National and City Hall theatres? Some of the people whom I conversed with say that many of Love of the Country Theatre’s artists were in a rehearsal and they did not know

whether the protest was happening. A person also told me that an artist who was the supporter of Tsegaye played a part in obliquely warning some of the artists not to join the demonstrators. I had a chance to talk to the supposed supporter of Tsegaye and he told me that he was not even in Ethiopia by that time and he knew nothing about the way the protest happened. After a long time, I found a magazine in which this artist gave an interview about the play that he staged during the protest. When I reminded him of the time, he said that memory betrayed him because it had been so long since the incident happened. On the other hand, Aselefech did not clearly remember what happened since she had already moved to the newly established Ras Theatre as the Deputy Director. The only person who joined the protest was not willing to talk about the protest in detail. As much further studies need to be conducted, these stories show not only how events from the past (both the archives and embodied memories) are fragmentary and incomplete but also the political fragments from the past are moving around with new nuances and tensions.

Embracing the only protester from Love of the Country Theatre, who joined them from a nearby café, the rest marched to *Art Kilo* Square chanting more slogans:

Be'Hizb Kinet Yenegdew Social Ebritegna Derasi Tsegaye G/M Yiwdem!

(Down with the Social Belligerent, Writer Tsegaye G/M who sold the People's Arts)!

Kine Tibeb Mestawet Nat, Awenabajun Atidebiqim!

(Art is a Mirror, It Doesn't Hide the Masquerader)!

Democracy Le'Kinetm! (Democracy to the Arts Too)!

Kinet Le'Hizb Tigil! (Art for People's Struggle)!

Kinet Ye Sefiw Hizb Nat! (Art belongs to the Mass)!⁶⁵

It is evident that the protesters wanted to call out Tsegaye. They wielded power through 'unity,' which only became possible because there were various forces wanting to 'topple' Tsegaye and use the protest to enact the programs of different political parties. There were many actors who came from the student movements from local and foreign universities and high schools and who joined civilian left groups that grew out of the student movements. Most of these people believed that Tsegaye monopolized the stage.⁶⁶ He presented two full length plays, *Ha Hu* and *Mother Courage* and four short plays under one banner, *Atsim Beyegetsu* (People's Skeletons): *Yemekdela Sinibit* (Farewell at Mekdela), *Sekokaw Petros* (Passion of Peter), *Tinsae Sendek Alama* (Revival of the Flag) and *Tilahun Gizaw*. Protesters held that Tsegaye denied others opportunities to participate in the revolution while he built his artistic as well as monetary capital.

Also present in the protest, but subtler was the political ideology that opposed Tsegaye's Ethiopian Socialism and the aesthetics he engendered. Most of the civilian left believed that Ethiopia's political movement was distinct from the African nationalist movement. They also conceded that there had to be a break with the traditional past and that scientific socialism should be Ethiopia's path under the leadership of intellectuals. Tsegaye's Ethiopian Socialism, on the other hand, meant the embrace of traditions and

⁶⁵ Photographs I found in the personal archives of artists Getachew Debalqe, Telela Kebede, and Alganesh Tariku.

⁶⁶ Interview with all artists that worked at the National and Love of the Country theatres. See also Aleme 26.

the participation of the masses without the elite's mistranslation and cooptation.⁶⁷

While his opponents argued against him saying that his aesthetics did not depict the proletariat as the protagonist of the revolution, Tsegaye insisted on staging plays that showed fierce class struggles. Thus, using their connections at the theatre, certain political groups used the protest to strike against Tsegaye. Particularly, EPRP used the demonstration to shout its well-known slogan, 'the people's government now!' Other questions of nations and nationalities, as well as Eritrea's issue of secession, entered the artists' protest through slogans brought by 'aliens' who joined the march from behind.

The assorted marchers moved past to *Arat Kilo*, where the parliament was located. The size of the demonstration grew bigger as more "passers-by" joined the protest. While they come from the narrow street in the direction of Piazza, it is said that Tsegaye had already phoned the *Derg*'s officials and told them that EPRP was staging a demonstration using its artist members.⁶⁸ When they approached *Arat Kilo* Square, soldiers began to appear from the sidewalks of the Tourist Hotel and Tesfa Gabre Sellassie Printing Press. Once the demonstrators reached the roundabout, the soldiers of the Provisional Military Administrative Council already surrounded them. Gunshots! The protesters were dispersed. Some stood firm and were determined.

Wearing the Ethiopian flag, two female performers confronted the soldiers.

"Shoot me if you want! I am here to ask for my rights!" Sometimes, tactics confront

⁶⁷ In Tsegaye's play *Ha Hu*, we find a character by the name of Ayaya Qale. As is evident in the previous discussions, Ayaya Qale is a nonverbal on whose cloth others posted collages of ripped newspapers. His translator, a girl who fled the famine in Northern Ethiopia, tells us how Ayaya Qale embraced Islam, Christianity, traditional beliefs and other epistemes. The playwright also sends his messages of embracing Ethiopia's traditional past and its relation to African-ness through his protagonist, Semu Nigus Tasse.

⁶⁸ My conversation with Captain Fikre Selassie Wegderes and some artists of the National Theatre who participated in the protest.

strategy in a “warlike” confrontation, taking the risk of facing bodily injuries. A soldier stabs an artist who was expelled from the National Theatre. “I had already left the theatre and started my business. I went out to demonstrate and stand beside my sisters!” she reminisced. Many were pushed to the ground and injured. Some were arrested while others managed to escape. The wife of a celebrated actor Wegayehu Nigatu, Amsale-Genet Yimer faced miscarriage after being beaten by a soldier. A drummer from the City Hall, Getachew Kuma was shot in the back and killed while he was running to the YMCA.

In its April issue, EPRP’s organ *Democracia* used hyperbolic terms to explain the protest and the attendant crackdown: “The Sharpeville kind of shooting! The Sharpeville kind of beating! The Sharpeville kind of killing,” (“Ke’Tiriw Wedih”). These are allusions to the deadly mass murder committed in Apartheid South Africa in 1976. On the other hand, Mei’son’s organ, *The Voice of the Broad Masses*, condemned *Democracia* saying that the conflict between the demonstrators and soldiers did not start because the latter took action, but rather it was deliberately incited by the heads of EPRP who joined the demonstration so as to provoke the soldiers using its groups called *Yetereba Budin* or “agent provocateurs.”⁶⁹ Reflecting on Mei’son’s view of the conflict, Aseged states that the artist who died during the demonstration, Getachew Kuma, was not a sympathizer of EPRP, but an innocent victim. Artists at city hall told me that Getachew

⁶⁹ Andargachew A. 339.

was the one who was organizing the city hall front for the protest and that he was known, at the theatre, as a member of EPRP.⁷⁰

Coupled with other confrontations that took place later, EPRP used the protest staged by the artists as one main discursive intervention for its military operation in and out of the cities. Using the protest as one of its evidences, EPRP argued that the possibilities for peaceful engagements were shattered by what it would call the “fascist-sellout” coalition (“Ke’Tiriw Wedih”). The discursive confrontations and the attendant collision of bodies tell us that the artistic field was also a site of struggle on which various forces were deployed.

These conditions made the movement of the female performers in the interstices of varied forces possible. The female performers fought against Tsegaye in the public space. The fight claimed the life of their colleague, a woman suffered a miscarriage, and many of the protesters were beaten and stabbed. Due to this demonstration, the relations in the perceived-conceived-lived spaces changed dramatically. Tsegaye was banned from setting foot in the National Theatre and was later arrested for some time (“Tesfaye to Nadew”). The Provisional Government of Socialist Ethiopia was obliged to give many artists who had been expelled by the Imperial regime and never considered regular employees of the government to resume their work, and to be permanent civil servants with the attendant benefits (“Letter from Civil Service”; “Letter from Council of Ministers”).

⁷⁰ Fantu Mandoeye, Mihiret Mizrete Ab, Wellela Assefa and Fikrte Getahun of City Hall, who worked with Getachew Kuma at the time, mentioned to me that he was an active participant in the political field as a member of EPRP. See also Surafel “Stage and State.”

However, victory is a precarious term and life form particularly in time-spaces where survival becomes a political question. The emergence of some members of the military council under their party called Sadad, which was led by Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam (who ruled the country for the coming fifteen years), posed many threats to the independence of the artists. What followed was known in the history of the 1974 revolution as the most degeneration of humanity into barbarous acts of killing one another. Though each political group has not stopped pointing its finger on the other, people have agonized over the atrocities, tortures, and killings that happened in the fierce fight between political groups. Yet, the military administration's ruthlessness went far to the point where families were asked to pay money for the bullets that the military or the revolutionary guard shot to kill their own daughter or son, sister or brother (Andargachew T). Naming their operation *Qey Shibir* (The Red-Terror), the military council and its civilian allies started at EPRP as a “retaliation” for the latter's kill squad assassinations or what the Military-Civilian pact called *Nech Shibir* [White Terror]) which targeted civilian and military people. *Qey Shibir* claimed the lives of thousands of youth leaving the people with long-lasting agonies. Coming out of the white-red summary killings which claimed the lives of thousands of people from all political groups, particularly those of the civilian leftists, Sadad quelled oppositions in spite of the fact that overt and covert struggles continued. At the theatre, Alemtsehay Wodajo became one of the artists victimized by Sadad. Because she was marked as the mastermind of the artists' protest, she had to camouflage herself and live in an underground life. In six months after the demonstration, artists like Debebe Eshetu negotiated with Sadad to bring Alemtsehay

back to the stage. She wrote a letter to one member of Sadat, Captain Tamrat Ferede mentioning that Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin was threatening her saying that “he would get her arrested and killed” (“Letter to Nadew”). During the time of red-white terror when a ‘revolutionary guard’ of a certain district would summarily kill someone, Alemtsehay managed to survive. She was also reinstated as an actor at the national theatre. Yet, Captain Tamrat made sure that she had to fill out and sign a membership form for his party Sadat before she began to work at the theatre.

Conclusion

Following my discussion in Chapter One, in which I raised questions about mis/representation of the past that rationalized a neoliberal structure of belonging in the present, this chapter has shown how there were multiple and conflicting spatial stories beyond the binary of ethnicity and class. Chapter Two has revealed how theatre and various kinds of performances were sites of rethinking the human, staging political ideologies and spaces of struggles. It shows competing ideologies between Ethiopian and scientific socialisms and the attendant possibilities, limit, inadequacies, oppression and political struggles that took place in and outside of the state-owned theatres particularly at the National Theatre and beyond. It also shows what other stories/theories were there during the emergence of the 1974 revolution that rethought the Enlightenment reasoning and denigration of body/emotion. Particularly Tsegaye’s version of Negritude is discussed to show the possibilities it accorded in rethinking subjectivity and universal history. The ways in which Tsegaye stage the everyday embodied lived experience of classed, gendered, raced, sexed, ethnicized, faithed and dis/abled subjectivities in the

National Theatre is informed by a Senghorian relationality between self and another.

Tsegaye's theorization/staging of embodied language and the way in which he relates self and social space engenders infinite openings in the universes of self-another.

On the other hand, this chapter exposes how a supposedly radical movement would still pose a challenge to marginalized women. It enquires into the limits of Tsegaye's Ethiopian/African socialism that highlighted questions of race, ethnicity, and religion being oblivious to the theorization of gender and sexuality albeit his theatrical productions considered the sexualized and commodified female bodies. Paradoxically, the Ethiopian socialist political and artistic project participated in dis/placing the sexualized and commodified female bodies while it re-spatialize Ethiopia in Pan-African space.

In this vein, the chapter attempts to uncover a contradictory understanding and performance of time and space by analyzing how a critical theory and performance aesthetics that account for open-ended dialectical spatiotemporal analysis registers at another level as a project of homogenization of time-space and alienation of sexed and gendered bodies. It shows how the very institutions designed for a struggle against multiple oppressions were used for the production of discourses that re-inscribed older moral codes and technologies of violence as they invented new ones such as Ethiopian/African nationalism.

The female performers were dialectically implicated in the process due to the historical material conditions that forced them to 'invite' men like Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin as leaders of their struggle. It was these developments that informed the way

female performers engendered their insurgencies. As much as they created a possibility for Tsegaye, they also made use of the chances he offered. Creating possibilities out of the available resources and making use of other opportunities produced by others, including patriarchal power, female performers of the national and patriotic theatres made constant moves not only by reproducing stereotypes but also by engendering radical postcolonial desires. Their insistence on creative space making helps us see the political in their actions. Using their thinking bodies, they widened the traditional idea of dramaturgy and performance using the seemingly scandalous space of their nightclubs as a space of political enactment. In doing so, they punctured the instability of the paradoxical bifurcations that a socialist male power wanted to conceal.

When Telela said “It was I who created Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin but he turned against me later on,” her words reveal at least one major scenario: They reveal how Telela and her colleagues had participated in the 1974 revolution and made it possible for Tsegaye to come back to the theatre as a ‘revolutionary’ playwright and official. This attests to the fact that female performers exploded the external/internal space or the pure/impure body that Tsegaye tried to create. In fact, their struggle won some victories in asserting themselves as workers/artists and ousted Tsegaye from the National Theatre. Yet, the relations of productions continued to challenge the lives of Telela and her colleagues in the wake of their small victories since the heteronormative infrastructure remained unchanged. For that reason, some female artists continued their bar business but only in *zigubign* or clandestinely due to the Military Council’s national campaign against

zimut adarinet which literally means “women who live from the sinful sexual transaction.”

Mis/representations are not frozen images but fleeting acts and relations that have their own historical material conditions of emergence and messy dialectical life. I see in the 1974 moment of a Marxist revolution not just monads but also another politics of mis/representation. Hence, the socialist depictions of Haile Selassie’s regime, which allowed Marxist revolutionaries including Tsegaye to re-inscribe violence, calls for the unmasking of multiple occlusions during the monarchical time-space. Occlusions that hide dialectical tensions, accumulated injuries and tactical insurgencies whose duress bear on the movement of postcolonial bodies in the present time-space. Chapter three will turn to these discussions.

CHAPTER THREE

Multiple Occlusions, Unending Moves:

Walking in-between Seductions and Repulsions of Empires

Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that the invention of female performers as impure bodies during the 1974 Marxist revolution would not have been possible and cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration three key points. These are: one, the military government's mis/representation of Haile Selassie's empire; two, the postcolonial (imperial and anti-imperial) productions of female subjectivity as sexualized, commodified, and impure body; and three, the ways in which female performers and women in general *walk* in social, everyday life spaces making imaginative and poetic counter-moves against the markings of their bodies as contaminated/contaminating.

Put differently, the military administration rebuked the *ancien régime* for not "tak[ing] any measure to prevent prostitution" and for even allowing it "to assume a respected position" ("Prevent and Eradicate"). However, realities prompt me to contend otherwise. The military's mis/representation elides not only the accumulated injuries Ethiopian female performers (women in general) endured, but also the insurgencies they enacted during Haile Selassie's rule. Further, the state's spotlight on Haile Selassie has produced only selective visibility of colonial modernity and its consequences. This elision necessitates a genealogical probing. Without dwelling on an explication of elision, I will discuss the ways in which the military administration reproduced procedures for

scrutinizing and naming sexualized and commodified female bodies as well as how targeted women engendered poetics of becoming under the pressure of Ethiopia's resistance to and translation of (colonial) modernity.

What is more, located at *arada* – the city center of Addis Ababa and thus the epitome of being *modern* in late nineteenth and twentieth century Ethiopia – Ethiopian professional theatres were sharing the neighborhood with the in/famous red-light district, *wube bereha* – *the beautiful desert*, or simply *desert* as some would have it.⁷¹ The geographic proximity between the Municipality and Love of the Country theatres, the St. George's Cathedral (whose Ark was part of the Adwa campaign in 1896 and where Empress Zewditu and Emperor Haile Selassie were crowned), the Municipality offices, Ethiopia Radio station and other governmental (formal) spaces on the one hand and red-light districts such as Wube Bereha, Serategna Sefer, Gedam Sefer, and Sebara Babur and other informal spaces on the other, offers an occasion to understand what Tracy Davis would call 'semiotic neighborhoods,' or "a neighborhood of all that is 'outside theatres' as well as 'all theatres' inside'" (Davis T.).

I draw attention to the survey sponsored by the Ministry of Social Affairs in the pre and post revolutionary period respectively, (1963-1974 and 1974-1983) and to the representational practices used by the state and its researchers in their surveys of *zimut adarawiwoch* (which literally means 'those who live from committing adultery'). I will contrast their findings with my performance ethnography of some of the female performers who lived in those time-spaces. In order to investigate the conditions that

⁷¹ The word *wube* originally referred to the name of a notable called *Dejach Wube* who lived in that area which was christened after him.

informed their movements and practices of the everyday life, I will review newspapers, magazines, radio and television interviews, and performances.

I analyze the “semiotic neighborhoods” of Ethiopian professional theatres through play texts, embodied memories, and theoretical reflections given by Ethiopian intellectuals and performers. I will then show how Ethiopia’s negotiation of European modernity (seductive and threatening at once) plays out on sexualized and commodified female bodies in twentieth-century Ethiopia. With the help of the concept of coloniality of power, as theorized by Aníbal Quijano and Sylvia Wynter, I engage with Ethiopian intellectuals-performers who theorized and performed anti/coloniality.

I will also bring together Shaden Tageldin’s notion of “translational seduction,” Marta Savigliano’s performative theorization of *walking*, and Henri Lefebvre’s idea of the tripartite space in order to unsettle the colonizer/colonized binary, the hybridity between the two, and the reduction of time into space. In so doing, I will show the ways in which marginalized female performers make *use* of social space through tactical *walking* in a city that invents and banishes sexualized and commodified bodies.

Denying Contradictions: Homogenization of Space-Time

In December 1984, the Socialist Ethiopia Provisional Military Government’s Ministry of Workers and Social Affairs published *A Research Presented to Prevent and Eradicate Livelihood on Adultery [“Prostitution”]*. The military regime used the research done by social workers to tackle the issues of *zimut/setegna adarinet* [“prostitution”] in particular and *bozenewoch* [lumpenproletariats] in general. The *Derg*’s Prime Minister Office called on Berehanu Bayeh, Minister of the Ministry of Social Affairs, to form a committee to conduct

studies on “*zimut adarinet*.” The earliest study the committee cited in its 1984 final research was the study conducted in ten cities in 1976, thus, two years after the 1974 revolution. The same ministry did another survey in 22 major towns of the country in 1981 with the aim of “counting prostitutes.” In March 1982, another committee presented a report to the ministry under the title “The Historical Emergence of Prostitution, Its Causes and the Problem it Instigated” (“Emergence of Prostitution”). Berehanu formed this committee in May 1983. A year later, the committee presented its research to the government. The document was divided into three chapters: “the emergence of prostitution, its spread, impact, and preventive strategy; measures taken to prevent and eradicate prostitution; and measures to be taken to prevent and eradicate prostitution.” Using this research, the military administration framed its campaign of ‘eradicating’ ‘prostitution’ in the country in the following manner:

[...] When the Italian fascist army occupied Ethiopia for five years [October 1935 – June 1940], Addis Ababa became the center of prostitutes for it was made the capital of this alien empire. Later on, after the Italian fascist invading army was chased away by the staunch struggle of all Ethiopian people, the feudo-bourgeoisie [Haile Selassie’s] empire, that came in [Italy’s] footsteps, did not take any measure to prevent prostitution and the problem spread because the regime allowed prostitution to assume a respected position as it gave unnecessary respect to certain well known prostitutes. [...]

The ousted oppressive regime even gave legal licenses to drink houses and to places that were favorable for practicing prostitution, letting prostitutes

be embraced by the society and playing a role in making it possible for them to participate in social life assuming respected status. (“Prevent and Eradicate” 2-8)

This study clearly states that “prostitution” had a pre-colonial history in the country. It argues that imperialist invaders (Turks, Arabs, Italians) played a part in intensifying the commodification of “prostitution” in Ethiopia. However, the research does not show how “commodification” took place and the way in which imperialism/colonialism bears on the process of “commodification.” In fact the study draws attention to what had been happening in Addis Ababa before the second Italo-Ethiopian war [1935-1941]. The *Derg* conceived the “feudo-bourgeoisie rule” as a system that came “in the footsteps” of Italian colonial rule. The research did not discuss the way in which the ‘alien’ colonial rule instituted ‘prostitution’ and how racialization, sexualization, commodification of female bodies bore on the postcolony.

These multiple occlusions, in turn, created a condition for the military junta to assert, “[T]here was not any measure that [Haile Selassie’s rule] took to prevent prostitution.” The *Derg* did not just accuse Haile Selassie’s empire of failure and/or incapability of “prevent[ing] prostitution” but held it accountable for according the women who committed “adultery” a “respected” position in the society. The military junta’s assertion makes it clear that this discursive invention is to mark and ostracize the female body. The research states that:

The ousted oppressive regime even gave legal licenses to drink houses and to places that were favorable for practicing prostitution, letting prostitutes be embraced by the society and playing a role in making it possible for them to participate in social life assuming respected status. (Ibid)

Such a rationalization allowed the military administration to admonish the former regime for spreading “prostitution” in the country and yet mis/represent the sexualized and commodified female bodies as tolerated and socially embraced. Unlike its rhetoric that denounced imperialism, the leftist narrative particularly the military administration social practices, in Lefebvrian sense, only saw the mere flesh of female bodies but not the contradictions in which they lived and how their bodies were burdened by accumulated injuries of history.

The socialist military administration held Haile Selassie’s rule as the major culprit and defined ‘prostitutes’ as “women who live on adultery.” In so doing, the administration made complex sexual work a sinful act, singling out and holding women accountable: morally and legally. The military junta alienated sexual workers from “social life” through acts of naming and dis/placing.

Writing on/off Female Bodies: Naming, Surveying, Mapping, and Dispossession

In order to map the city and manage the ways in which female bodies move in the social space, the military administration selected sexualized and commodified female bodies, conducted continuous surveys and named them *zimut adariwoch*. “Mapping, which involves exploration and surveying,” writes Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o “[is] followed by naming” and it paves the “road to power and domination” (7). Though he acknowledges that the body speaks/acts through “body language,” Thiong’o reminds us how “it has also been used as a writing surface” so much so that it “carr[ies] messages against itself” (9). In Lefebvre’s terms, this is the work of representations of space, which is the realm of “knowledge,” “signs,” “codes” and “frontal relations” (33). Since it is entangled with the

“relations of productions” and the power “those relations impose,” representation of the body is a “dominant space in any society” (“Prevent and Eradicate” 33-38). These representations draw on “scientific knowledge” and “ideology” to order the body’s relation with other bodies and with nature. Along with the spatial practices that sanitize space or render social relations devoid of any contradiction, representations of space deploy epistemic resources to mark and displace marginalized women. That marking legitimizes violence.

The socialist administration deliberately framed any involvement in sexual activity to make a living as *non-work*. The 1984 research, which cited from Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engels’ works, posits “prostitution” as a socio-economic and cultural problem that resulted from class oppression (1,13). Due to this, the research argued, “prostitution” was also a “woman question” in that the women involved were double burdened by gender as well as by socio-economic position. The research, however, asserted that “prostitutes” did not constitute a class but were just *yebozenew kifil* (déclassé) part of a group comprising *bozene* (vagrant), *majrat mechi* (assailant-robber), *lemagn* (beggar – usually associated with disabled people including leprosy sufferers), *kumartegna* (gambler), *setegna adari* (‘prostitutes’/not sex workers). This categorization is akin to that of Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, in which he lumps these people together: “vagabonds, demobbed soldiers, discharged convicts, runaway galley slaves, swindlers and cheats, thugs, pickpockets, conjurers, card-sharps, pimps, brothel keepers, porters, day-labourers, organ grinders, scarp dealers, knife grinders, tinkers, and beggars” (63). The Amharic word *bozenewoch* became an equivalent translation of the term

lumpenproletariat which was first coined and further articulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (*Manuscripts; German Ideology*). It is in their attempt to invent the proletariat as a revolutionary class that Marx and Engels defined the proletariat against the *lumpenproletariat* which, in their conception, is a “dangerous class,” nay “the social scum,” and “rotting mass” whose “amorphous” position made it a “bribed tool of reactionary intrigue” (*Manuscripts* 220). This non-class is, therefore, conceived as mere body, which lacks consciousness. In this thinking, the *lumpenproletariats* are instruments of and for others. “[T]he proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class,” Marx and Engels argued, “[while] the other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry” (219).

What the Ethiopian state called “*bozenewoch*” have had a long and multilayered history. Particularly during the 1974 revolution, “*bozenewoch*” were perceived/conceived the socialist military administration as indeterminate group that inhabited an ambiguous position. René Lefort described them just as ‘cannon fodder’ – bodies to be expended in somebody else’s confrontations (Lefort *Heretical* 54). For that matter, all the revolutionaries – be it the civilian left or the radical military – used an orthodox Marxian lens to consider the unemployed segment of the society as a group that was always already susceptible to manipulation by ‘reactionaries’ (It should be noted during the 1974 revolution almost all of the leftist political groups were labeling each other as ‘reactionary’).

The 1984 research on “prostitution” done by the Ministry of Social Affairs postulates:

Those who are under evil of prostitution belong to the *lumpenproletariat*

[and] their weak political position makes favorable conditions for an

enemy and renders them dangerous to the society and to the nation.

Particularly, because prostitutes get involved in spying and spreading

tittle-tattles, their adverse effect on revolutionary progress and attitudes

will be huge” (“Prevent and Eradicate” 13).

The ambiguous position ascribed to the “déclassé” informed revolutionary activities in the 1970s. There were hot debates around this issue between various political parties like the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement, EPRP, and the military administration. While some of them espoused that “revolutionary elites could form a Red army using sex workers,” others argued that they should not even name sex workers as “workers but prostitutes” given that “they were only dependents on the rest of the society and should only be rehabilitated to become proletariats/workers.”⁷² At the same time, there was also fear on all sides that the *lumpenproletariat*/sex workers could be cannon fodder to one of the political groups unless they were “revolutionized.”⁷³

The banishment of consciousness from the sexualized and commodified female body denied the demands sexual workers presented in demonstrations at the very beginning of the revolution. That banishment was an act of debilitating consciousness of

⁷² Conversation with Fantahun Tiruneh (former member of EPRP who had worked for the Ministry of Social Affairs).

⁷³ Interview with Fikirte Gebre-Mariam (member of EPRP, a partner of the member of the politburo, and later a participant in the guerrilla fight against the *Derg*), Haile-Melekot Mewa’el (novelist and former member of EPRP who served as the head of Sebenek (Social Services) and was involved in an underground movement, using that space to recruit and work with women who were working at various bars and hotels as “sex workers”), Tiru-Work Waqeyo (Member of All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement and later Chairperson of the All Ethiopian Women’s Association under the *Derg*), Captain Fikre Selassie Wogderes (Prime Minister of Ethiopia in the Military regime), and Major Fesseha Desta (Vice-President of Ethiopia in the Military regime).

the body, Fanon and Wynter would say, for sexual workers were categorized as lumpenproletariat who were posited by leftists as mere instruments of “anti-revolutionaries.” Sexualized and commodified women were neither idle nor docile. They were making *use* of the social space, “seek[ing] to change and appropriate” it as Lefebvre would have it (39). In 1978, Marina and David Ottaway wrote, “every group from prostitutes to lay priests went out on strike for better wages and working conditions” (Ottaways 4). In 1981, René Lefort stated that “Even the prostitutes – there were several tens of thousands of them in Addis Ababa – marched to defend their demands” (55).⁷⁴ Devoid of “consciousness of [their own] present” time-space, to borrow Benjamin’s terms, the heteropatriarchal leftists erased the sexual labour that constituted the largest employment sector (335, 000 women said to be involved in sexual work) by the time of the revolution when they considered sexual work as a non-work (Laketch). In order to legitimate their acts of awakening the ‘docile/unconscious’ bodies of that sector, they denied the embodied consciousness of the sexual workers who were acting in the public space to change their position. However, “they rather awakened us,” said Zenebework Taddesse, a veteran feminist scholar who was an active participant during the revolution,

⁷⁴ On a related note, the national newspaper, *Addis Zemen* featured a brief story on the news about the “prostitutes’ protest” not on first hand report but through a letter sent to the well-known journalist Paulos Gnogno’s column called “I Have One Question.” According to the reader, he heard on the “The German Radio Station [Doutsche Welle’s Amharic Service] reported on March 15 [1974] that Addis Ababa’s prostitutes appealed to the government. And [presented] these demands: 1. Let the government establish an association for us, 2. Let us get free health service, 3. A minimum price should be set for us [in our business interaction]. What did they contribute to the government to pose these demands?” Paulos Gnogno, “I Have One Question,” *Addis Zemen*, May 3, 1974. The journalist answered, “the very statement that they [the women] posed question was wrong.” Ibid. Gnogno’s answer is dubious in that it does not tell whether the women did not pose those specific questions or whether they did not protest at all. However, taking this journalist’s words for granted and coupling these with other stories he heard, an otherwise meticulous reader, Andargachew Asseged represents the demonstration the women staged as a story that was told in “moments of flippancy.” Andargachew T. 49.

reminiscing about the protest that sexual workers staged in Addis Ababa.⁷⁵ Major Fesseha Desta, who was the first liaison between the Ethiopian Women's Coordinating Committee (EWCC) and the *Derg* (military council) and who had served as vice president of the country during the military rule, recalled that he witnessed when *setegna adariwoch* (sex workers) demonstrated in the city, particularly in the well-known *wube - bereha* and St. George's Cathedral areas.⁷⁶ He also told me that it was because of their participation in the demonstration that EWCC invited the sex workers to its second meeting.

For many people, *sebe-nek* ('social services') was also another space associated with participation of sexual workers in the 1974 revolution. In my conversation with an Ethiopian novelist, Haile-Melekot Mewa'el, who served as the chairperson of social service associations, *sebe-nek* comprised various private organizations such as schools and hotels. It was instituted through Employees Proclamation No. 64/68.⁷⁷ Haile-Melekot used the space for his underground political activism as a member of EPRP and worked with a number of sexual workers in advancing the political aims of his party. The Intelligence Service under the Ministry of Interior, which was conducting espionage under one secret mission (code 222) wrote in its confidential letter that *setegna adariwoch* (sex workers) were involved in political activities with EPRP. On the other

⁷⁵ Conversation with Zenebework Tadesse.

⁷⁶ Conversation with Fesseha Desta. See Fesseha *Abyotu ena Tizitaye [The Revolution and My Reminiscence]*; Hiwot.

⁷⁷ Though the *Derg* ratified this proclamation in the beginning of the revolution, it revoked it later on in its 1984 research on "prostitutes." The research reads: "Since there are sex workers organized under *Sebenek* (social services) by Employees Proclamation No. 64/68, the law needs to be amended with respect to [disavowal of sex workers as one force in the revolution]." "Prevent and Eradicate" 21.

hand, EPRP killed sexual workers for “collaborating” with the military administration and its leftist civilian allies like Mei’son (Fikre Selassie *Egna ena Abyotu*).

The involvement of sexual workers in the demand for social change obliged a Marxist feminist magazine, *Tenesh Ethiopawit* (Rise, The Ethiopian Woman), to engage with the issue of the *lumpenproletariat* particularly “prostitutes” (“Question of Prostitution”). The World Wide Ethiopian Women Study Group, which published *Tenesh* from New York, emphatically wrote in its magazine that the “side the *shermutoch* [derived from the Arabic term *sharmūta*, which means “prostitutes”] took in the revolution” and the “significance of creating engagement with the issue of prostitution and prostitutes” need to be considered for the revolution to take a different course. In one particular edition, which is entirely dedicated to “The Question of Prostitution,” the magazine openly states that “[t]he fact that prostitutes march along with the people in the historical and popular movement signifies that they are not out of the people’s movement and it indicates that they have hope in social change. Therefore, failing to pull the prostitutes to [the center of] the revolution is akin to widen[ing] and strengthen[ing] the anti-revolutionary army” (Ibid). This was one of the rare occasions when the leftist intelligentsia/the elite spoke about the sexual workers’ demonstration and their ‘participation’ in the revolution. The article also articulates certain nuances specific to the Ethiopian case namely the notion that Ethiopian “prostitutes” should not be viewed as their counterparts in the West (‘prostitutes and their male pimps’) arguing that the former live in a different condition and that there is potential to ‘correct this social malaise’ (2).

These are two of the mottos that end the introductory essay to the magazine's issue on the problem: "Let Prostitution Be Eradicated in Ethiopia, Let Prostitutes Participate in the Democratic Revolution" (3).

However, the New York-based Marxist feminist study group did not articulate possible participation in a "democratic revolution" based on acknowledgment to the "consciousness" of the "prostitute" in particular and of the *lumpenproletariat* in general. It did not take a conceptual cue from the Black Panther movement (which considered the *lumpenproletariat* as one conscious revolutionary force) or from Fanon (who voiced appreciation for the *lumpenproletariat*'s potency as a "veritable reservoir of a national revolutionary army") or from Herbert Marcuse (who took the *déclassé* as a "radical force.") (Fanon *Wretched* 11; Marcuse 73).⁷⁸ For these Marxist feminists of the Ethiopian student movements in the diaspora, "prostitutes" did not still belong to a class but to the underclass with "those who live from begging and thievery" ("Question of Prostitution" 2). According to their magazine, for the "prostitutes" to participate in the revolution the elites should understand their condition, examine the hierarchy among "prostitutes," and "separate the wheat from the chaff" (Ibid). Hence, it is through specific procedures, which continue to accord revolutionary leadership to the elite, that the 'potentially revolutionary' 'prostitutes' would be "pick[ed]." Besides, the idea of cannon fodder is still embedded in this concept in that it equates the "failure not to pull the prostitutes into the revolution" with "consolidating the army of antirevolutionaries" (Ibid).

⁷⁸ Fanon adds a caveat, though, when he says that the *lumpenproletariat* would be reactionary and serve the oppressor unless the revolution centers the mass.

Hence the leftist discourse on the *lumpenproletariat* in general and sexual workers in particular is predicated on a special practice that perceives body as devoid of consciousness and banishes it from what Fanon calls a dialectical “spatio-temporal world.” The military administration then represents the sexual workers as “weak” bodies who are “vulnerable to the enemy” and thus “dangerous to the nation and fellow compatriots” (“Prevent and Eradicate” 13). The ways in which abstraction of space corresponds with the mere body and the writing of plans on it (through discourse) to ultimately fix it in a place, Lefebvre holds, also correspond to an abstraction of labor which can be understood in Marxian terms as “social labour that produces exchange value,” thereby “the general form of the commodity.” Never a “mental abstraction,” but having a “social existence,” such a homogenized space “transports the body outside of itself in a paradoxical kind of alienation” (“Question of Prostitution” 2). Hence, the left politics in the student movements and the military administration rendered the *déclassé* as a non-class, sexual work as non-work, and sexual workers as “dangerous to the nation and compatriots.” This abstraction of sexual labour and exiling of the sexualized body from the social space through misrepresentation of the past (as a homogenized/cohesive space) raises questions about the very contradiction saturated in the representation of space, since there is nothing homogenous about the so-called homogenous space as Lefebvre reminds us.

Reproduction of Relations: Re-Citing Empire

Despite the military administration’s attempt to abstract space, body, and labour through re-search and naming, there was never a moment in which Haile Selassie’s empire failed to

suspend its anxiety about and its management of what it also called, “*zimut adarinet*” or *setegna darinet* (‘livelihood on adultery’).⁷⁹ This history has many layers to be uncovered. One can use the military junta’s earliest reference to the research on “prostitution” to show its tacit and uncanny relations with Haile Selassie’s use of research as a method to map its empire and to control sexualized and commodified Ethiopian female bodies. The earliest research mentioned by the military junta’s 1984 study was one conducted in 1976 to survey “ten cities” of various regions of Ethiopia. However, the 1976 research was a continuation of another survey that began when Haile Selassie I was in power. On May 14, 1974, Million Neqniq, the minister of the Ministry of National Community Development and Social Affairs (MCOSA), commissioned his teams to conduct research on “prostitutes and juvenile delinquents in ten cities” (“Letter to Ministry of Interior”). The Endalkachew Cabinet, which was the last council of Haile Selassie’s regime, gathered representatives of “governmental and non-governmental organizations” to conduct a research on “prostitution” on June 19, 1974 (“Circular from Ministry of Social Affairs”).⁸⁰

That process culminated in the “National Research on *Zimut Adarinet*” which was published in October 1975 after the *Derg* eliminated the last cabinet of the empire (“On *Zimut Adariwoch*”). The 1975 national research focused on nine topics: causes of prostitution [in Ethiopia]; the negative impact of prostitution on the people; short and long term measures to be

⁷⁹ As it has also been observed afterwards, Haile Selassie’s regime also called these women *set adariwoch* (sex-workers) though it had named them in the 1960s *tidar fet setoch* (divorced women) to refer to them as prostitutes. Yet it needs to be noted that there were times in which Haile Selassie’s empire included male prostitution in the definition of the term *zimut/set adarinet* though the *Derg* attached prostitution to only the female bodies. MCOSA. *Sile Tidar-fet setoch: Ye’Setegna Adarinetin Lemegenes weym Lemekelakel Yetederege Tinat ena Yeqerebe Hasab*. [About Divorced Women: A Research on Reduction or Prevention of Prostitution and a Proposal of Idea.].

⁸⁰ The circular came out on June 19, 1974 from Ministry of Community Organization and Social Affairs. National Archive. This ministry changes its names at various times. Also known as Ministry of Community Organization and Social Affairs.

taken against prostitution; laws that would help to prevent prostitution; executive organizations and human resources and power; small and big industries for women; ideas given by prostitutes; short description about the research made to know the importance of vocational training program for Ethiopian young girls and women; and lesson plan prepared for domestic assistantship training for women.

Further genealogical probing helps to unearth sedimented disciplinary mechanisms and spatial reorganizations that Haile Selassie's official narratives deployed. The Ministry of the Interior, the Municipality, MCOSA and at times the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were mainly responsible in the empire's fight against what they usually termed 'social evils' and 'moral decadence.' For instance, following the mayor's call, a committee at MCOSA presented a research to the higher government officials in October 1965 ("Sile Tidar Fet Setoch").⁸¹ Higher officials of Haile Selassie had already deliberated on the issue in 1963 (Ibid). In 1968 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received an answer from MCOSA about the "draft law on regulation of prostitution" ("Letter from Ministry of Foreign Affairs"). Though the state started taking forceful measures in the 1950s and 1960s, there was a desire on the part of some higher officials since the 1940s to forge "regulation of prostitution" in "Addis Ababa and in all regions of the empire [in view of] the disease that would ravage the people due to the increase in number of prostitutes" ("Letter in Ministry of Interior").

What forced the empire to urgently conduct an even earlier nation-wide research at the beginning of the 1950s, however, was the international dispatch that came on March 28, 1952, from the United Nations to the Ethiopian Government ("Letter from the United Nations"). The

⁸¹ The full title of the research is *Sile Tidar-fet setoch: Ye'Setegna Adarinetin Lemeqenes weym Lemekelakel Yetederege Tinat ena Yegerebe Hasab*. And it can be translated as "About Divorced Women: A Research on Reduction or Prevention of Prostitution and Proposal of an Idea."

United Nations had ratified an agreement on March 21, 1950, to suppress the “traffic in women and children” that involved “all aspects of commercialized prostitutions, especially procuring, inciting or leading away women or children of either sex for immoral purposes in order to gratify the passions of another person, or attempting to commit those offences” (Ibid). Based on that agreement, member states were responsible for submitting reports with answers to the questions the UN had prepared. Coming out of the five-year long devastating Italian colonial occupation and still marred by British (the so-called comrade-in-arms) claim over Ethiopia as a conquered enemy territory, Haile Selassie was negotiating between local and global spaces. He was busy consolidating his empire, imposing himself as an unquestionable king of kings, by withdrawing traditionally held power from the nobility, forming a Pan-African and Non-Aligned alliance with leaders of the ‘Third World,’ working with the United States to fend off England’s influence, and re-presenting his empire as one of the members of the family of nations in the West.

Hence, when it mobilized its empire to answer the questionnaire that the UN dispatched, Ethiopia was performing its duty as one family of nations in the world negotiating and embodying multiple contradictions. The questionnaire comprised eight queries under the following titles: measures [taken against the “traffic in women and children”]; licensed or recognized brothels; convictions; cases of international traffic; communications between central authorities; repatriation and deportation; observations and suggestions; and measures related to venereal diseases (Ibid).⁸² The Ethiopian state took this call from the UN as its one major task and circulated the questions across its empire once it translated each and every word of the UN’s

⁸² Ibid. The questionnaire arrived as an attachment to the letter that the UN sent to the Ethiopian government.

document. The officials at the ministries of Foreign Affairs and of the Interior transmuted the term “prostitution” to the Amharic word “*setgna adarinnet*.” Though the researches were not systematic and most of them seemed rushed, each and every region gathered information from their respective local administrations called *awraja* (larger area/zonal administration) and *woreda* (smaller area district/administration).⁸³

Following the nationwide surveys, conducting researches became one of the methods that the state used to legitimate mapping the empire’s towns and sanitizing sexed bodies. On the heels of the five-year Italian colonial rule in Ethiopia, which segregated bodies/spaces along *indigeno*/white racial lines, a public discourse was making economically disenfranchised sexualized Ethiopian women responsible for sleeping with remnants of “the enemy” and for the spread of ‘undisciplined fatherless mixed-race children’ who were framed as threats to the “behavior of the society” as well as to “the unity of the people” (“Protection of Race”). Making use of and feeding into these kinds of discourses, the Addis Ababa municipality and many of the ministries worked in tandem to regulate the movement of bodies in the name of public health, moral code, law, and order stressing at times the policing of queer bodies, male sexual workers, and sexual contact with animals.

⁸³ The responses ranged from those who gave detailed answers to some of the questions to others who confirmed that there were “*setegna adariwoch*” (single women) but not “prostitutes.” The term *setegna adari*, which was rendered as an equivalent word with the English term, “prostitute,” used to have completely different and various meanings. According to the Amharic Dictionary published by the Language Academy at Addis Ababa University *setegna adari* is defined not as a “sex worker” but as a person who commits sin by engaging in a business transaction through sexual contacts. *Setegna adari* used to mean “a nun; a woman who does not have a husband; a single woman.” At the same time, however, there were regions that identified *setegna adariwoch* as “prostitutes” following the UN intent. In fact, the history of Ethiopian sexualized and commodified females can be complicated by taking the (English) term “prostitution” as a point of departure, since the ways in which European travellers, scholars, and the state have been using it camouflage post/colonial epistemic and embodied violence. One would wonder who did what to female bodies in giving them these different names: *amarit*, *galemota* (*galemotegninet/gilmutina*), *zema* (*zimut/ zemawit*), *wishima*, *dengetsur*, *mehababeya*, *shermuta*, *setegna adari*, *tidar fet set*, and *zimut adari*. See Bahru, “Gondar in the Early Twentieth Century”; Merid; Pankhurst “The History of Prostitution in Ethiopia” 1974; Taddesse; Alvarez; Huntingford.

The mayors of Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa Police, Ministries of MCOSA, Health Department of the municipality, representatives of charity organizations, treasury, and sanitation department orchestrated one of the studies that came out of the above-mentioned interventions. Calling for promulgation of stronger laws than the ones proclaimed in 1951 and 1957, this decision expelled ordinary *meshetea betoch* (drinking houses) with their minstrel performances from the following main avenues: Haile Selassie I Avenue, *Dej Azmach* Jote Road – (which stretched from Haile Selassie I Star Square to the Grand Palace), Churchill Road, Roosevelt Road, King George Avenue up to Queen Elisabeth Avenue, from Queen Elisabeth Avenue to Fikre-Mariam Aba Techan Road, from Empress Menen Road to Queen Zewditu Road, Empress Taitu Road, Cunningham Road, Ben-Gurion Road, Colson Road, [Prince] Asfaw Wossen Road, *Mesfin* [Prince of] Harrar Road, Patriots’ Road, Sudan Road, Filwuha Road, Jimma-Desse Road, and Harrarge Road.⁸⁴

On the one hand, the streets and landmarks of Addis bore the names of local empire builders like Menelik II, Haile Selassie I, Empress Taitu (who renamed the city as Addis Ababa [New Flower]), and Empress Zewditu who dispossessed various members of societies as much as they fought against colonialism. On the other, ironically, the postcolonial social space carried symbols of global-colonial empire like King George and Queen Elizabeth. Recalling Addis Ababa’s recent involvement in the Second World War, the names Churchill, Cunningham, Colson and Ben-Gurion marked Ethiopia’s neo/postcolonial relations with the West, which informed the country’s involvement in cold war political economy, Middle Eastern geopolitics, and Pan-African and non-aligned relations.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

When the Italian colonial regime renamed the Menelik boulevard, which ran from *Arada* (city/market center) to *Arat Kilo* (where the palace was located) as Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, a wide thoroughfare that ran across Rome, it was not just erasing the Other but also penetrating into and imposing itself on a presumably backward place. Ontologically conceived as such, the civilizing mission also arrived as a spatial project. When Haile Selassie I later re-baptized the same road in his own name, he was not just uncovering a palimpsest but writing new stories of victory that also hinged on disavowal of local freedom fighters (those who put up resistance while Haile Selassie was in exile) certain ethnic groups, women, and certain religious and other groups and individuals. We can see how the organization of space is a continuous contradiction of spaces and dialectical inter-penetrations. Spaces being sites of freedom as much as oppressions, slippages figure into the engendering of freedom.

Hence banishment of drinking houses, particularly ordinary drinking houses from these avenues was tantamount to sanitizing the nation's body/politic and helping Haile Selassie's empire appear clean and stand (morally) upright in the face of the West. On another level, for he experienced global racism as a black exile in England after he fled the onslaught of the formidable Italian colonial military advancement, Haile Selassie was fighting back against colonial emasculation and re-erecting his imperial power by reinventing his person as a leader of Pan-Africanism. The language of his postcolonial project was gauged along the moral and sanitation codes of global-local relations. The Italian architect who had worked with Emperor Haile Selassie, building massive buildings such as the City Hall and the Africa Hall, reminisces: "Addis Ababa soon began to assume the form predicted by the Emperor. One day it would

become a metropolis and Africa's moral capital" ("Reappraisal" 6). The emperor was translating Europe's architectural languages and signs, thereby the attendant epistemes and practices into spaces in Ethiopia, while he was emerging as a Pan-African leader who was conscious of what it meant to live in the postcolony. That was akin to what happened before the Ethio-Italian interwar period, 1896-1935, when Ethiopian intellectuals were at once seduced by and frightened of European modernity, which I would call un/translatability. By un/translatability, I am referring to the tension between Ethiopian intellectuals' desire to translate Europe's modernity (due to also Europe's seductive moves to be translated) and the Ethiopians' resistance against the coloniality of Europe's (the West's) modernity. Understanding the period's importance, my concern is about the ways in which these un/translatabilities play out on female bodies, particularly on sexualized-commodified performers.

The *Derg*'s 1984 national research omitted its connection to the studies conducted before 1976 in its attempt to write a new socialist history. Read against the grain, this fact highlights neither a mere plagiarism nor a deliberate parody but a historical irony that reveals the instability of the bifurcation that the *Derg* wanted to invent: the end of Haile Selassie's Feudo-bourgeoisie rule and the socialist inauguration of new time. It is a Hegelian and Marxian dialectics.

Between Post/Colonial Seductions and Repulsions: Politics of Un/Translatability

In Aníbal Quijano's conception of coloniality, the organization of power along lines of sex, labour, authority and subjectivity – with the attendant resources and products – is intertwined. For that reason the binary colonized/colonizer model is untenable since power also functions as a seductive energy. Quijano writes, "beyond repression, the main instrument of all power is its seduction. Cultural Europeanisation was transformed into an aspiration. It was a way

of participating and later to reach the same material benefits and the same power as the Europeans” (“Coloniality” 23). Shaden Tageldin complicates such an understanding of seduction by introducing the notion of translational seduction, thereby, colonial power relations.

Tageldin filters out Jean Baudrillard’s ahistorical conception of power and recuperates his idea of the “in-between” which does not just trouble the domination/resistance binary but also complicates forms of power by going beyond a “hybrid of the two” (*Disarming* 12). Tageldin then brings Gayatri Spivak’s idea of a “politics of translation” that interrogates the “seductions” lurking in acts of translation so as to account for and “surrender to the text” thereby acknowledging differences and understanding inequalities (Ibid). Letting Baudrillard and Spivak complement one another, Tageldin builds her theory (politics) of “translational seduction” that “might divert the language, epistemes, and very being of the dominated to approximate those of the dominator” (Ibid).

Translational seduction can be used to explain how intellectuals engaged with what they called *silitane/zemenawinet* or civilization/modernity at the beginning of twentieth-century Ethiopia. More important, Tageldin’s tactical move to “hold the door between domination and resistance ajar” by including yet transcending Homi Bhabha’s notion of “structural collusion” helps me to see how translational seductions insert, invent and play out on Ethiopian women as sexualized and commodified bodies. Tageldin’s attention to “politicohistorical” sensibilities allows me to consider the particularities of Ethiopia which – unlike Egypt, the problem space with which Tageldin deals – has never “lost [its] sovereignty” but fought for its political independence while resisting the condition of coloniality (the raced, gendered, sexed, classed matrix of power) and the dangers of colonialism.

At the turn of the twentieth-century, the invention and the emergence of the Ethiopian ‘abject’ (abjected) female body were tied to the colonality of power. Notwithstanding the subsequent dominant exceptionalist narrative, which posits Ethiopia as an un-colonized empire, capitalizing on the victory of Adwa that took place in 1896, I say that Ethiopian intellectuals (mostly male writers), were seduced by colonial modernity even as they fought against and appropriated it. Sponsored by the regent Teferi Mekonen (before he became emperor in 1930), the newspaper called *Berehan ena Selam* (Light and Peace) was one of the spaces where those intellectuals debated and exchanged ideas mainly about the need for and the dangers of civilization/modernity (*silitane/zemenawinet*). The exigencies of colonial modernity informed newspaper articles, public speeches and various performances that regenerated nationalism through the language of *ye’hager fikir* (love for the country).

Indeed, one would argue that Ethiopia maintained its political ‘independence’ because it succeeded in defeating its foreign invaders at various times and on various battlefields, including Adwa, where it defeated Italy on March 1, 1896. In Harold Marcus’s words, “The battle of Adwa proved conclusively that an African power could successfully meet the challenge of modern European imperialism; *five days* later the Italians recognized the fact by suing for peace” (Marcus 162). Translated as a racial issue, Adwa signified black people’s victory over white colonialist power. Italy lured Ethiopia into and sealed “an agreement of friendship,” forging what Tageldin calls an “appearance of equivalence” out of “two differences,” its politics of translation denying the ethics of “surrendering to the text.” However, Italy again *forged* its version of the agreement,

changing the Ethiopian term *could* into *should* in order to impose itself on Ethiopia as a protectorate. Indeed, the praxis of translation in this case shows how the “treaty of friendship” was an enigmatic encounter that, in Tageldin’s words, “transform[ed] the disempowered into the delusory ‘likeness’ of the empowered” (14).

Provided that the colonizer/colonializing power always desires to see the total capitulation of the other as a realization of its historical progress, Ethiopia’s refusal to surrender to the colonial text and the subsequent war show that the politics of untranslatability also serves as a space of hope for the others (Africans and the Black diaspora) who translated Adwa as *their* victory and Ethiopia as *their* country (Munro). Recently, Raymond Jonas calls Adwa a world-significant victory paralleled neither by the 1898 U.S. victory over the Spanish in Philippines nor by the 1904-05 Japanese triumph over Russia (335). The Adwa victory sent shock waves through white colonial imperialist Europe and Jim Crow America, disrupting the myth of Eurocentric reason and progress, the myth of the ethno-class called Man as a destiny, thereby, *history* as the West knew it. And yet, a young Ethiopian intellectual, Gebre-Hiwot Baykedagn (1886-1919), asked in 1919: “Can we say that we Ethiopians have independence [despite our victory over colonialism]?” (102).⁸⁵

This question reveals how precarious is the politics of un/translatability. It opens a

⁸⁵ Gebre-Hiwot was a ten-year-old boy when Ethiopia fought against Italy in Adwa, a place in the northern part of Ethiopia, where he was born and raised. He went to Europe (stowed away in a ship) from Massawa (in present-day Eritrea) where he found an Austrian host family and studied medicine at the University of Berlin. Upon his return, Gebre-Hiwot served at Emperor Menelik’s court as an interpreter while he was advancing his Amharic language studies. Instead of pursuing his career based on his medical studies, Gebre-Hiwot focused on issues of global economy, division of labour, social history, state formation, arts of government/right way of governing people, local histories, knowledge/education advancement, and development. See Bahru, *Pioneers; Society, State and History*.

possibility to widen and to pluralize both the entry and the exit points in the discussion of the colonality of power and its translational seductions. Gebre-Hiwot knew that colonality was not just embedded in colonialism but also transcended the question of political independence, however understood, to the extent that it would devour the uncolonized too. Interestingly enough, Gebre-Hiwot also redefined the condition of colonality as a state of vulnerability to colonialism.

Following Gebre-Hiwot Baykedagn's theorization of colonality in the 'absence' of colonialism, Melaku Bayen (1900-1940) deployed the language of public health and sanitation to explain the condition of colonality in Ethiopia. In *Berehan ena Selam* (Light and Peace), the same newspaper in which Gebre-Hiwot and other writers shared their thoughts on global-local political-economy and socio-cultural issues, Melaku writes: "Thanks be to him, our brother, his Excellency *Negadras* Gebre-Hiwot Baykedagn says the following when he discusses the matter in his book [*Government and Public Administration*]: "having freedom means being free from poverty through self-reliance." Following that, Melaku asserts, "unless the people are free from poverty, disease, and sickness that would be preventable in time [...] the independence of the state is just nominal" ("System for Life Care" 207).

Melaku's reflections on the issues of health are framed by his discussion of race globally and of Ethiopia's position in the world. In one of his essays for *Berehan ena Selam*, which he wrote while he was in the United States, where he was attending his higher education and later enlisting Black Americans to come to and work in Ethiopia, Melaku Bayen says:

Today, only Ethiopia's children live proudly wherever we go due to our country's name that is inscribed [as a sign of independence]. The rest of the black race from one end of the world to the other end have stooped down and were despised and degraded by the whites. O my compatriots, if one sees me when I proclaim with pride and bravery that I am an Ethiopian, I am from Ethiopia, it seems that it is me who rules the world. [...] The reason for our pride in our country is the resistant history that we inherited from our ancestors. It is due to Ethiopia's fertility. It is due to our untrammelled state. Even though we have not thus far been blessed with the modernity of the time, [...] because we are seeking for the modernity of the day urgently, we do not feel ashamed of the fact that we hail from Ethiopia. [...] However, living in the ancient Christian state as an independent [empire] would not be any better on its own than being ruled by a foreign state. If all newborns are defeated by disease, where lies the meaning of freedom? (Ibid)

Melaku Bayen shows here that Ethiopians should be proud about inheriting political independence from their ancestors. Though his tone seems to be esoterically nationalist, which does not seem to account for other peoples' complex histories of resilience and resistance, his lived experience in the United States and his views against global racism attest that Melaku was well aware of the black peoples' conditions. Melaku was in a way maneuvering the already existing Ethiopian patriotism in order to critique its inadequacy. Thus, at the same time, he makes it clear that Ethiopians live in a postcolonial condition

where that very political independence is in question. He stresses the urgency to translate languages and concepts of “modernity of the day” without entirely denigrating Ethiopia’s past. It is in view of these tensions that Melaku Bayen brings the issue of poverty and health as one defining factor of modern subjectivity. Melaku’s insistence on “seeking urgently for modernity of the day” shows how modern technologies of the West seduced him. However, Europe’s discourse of the black peoples’ ‘barbarity,’ ‘backwardness,’ ‘filth’ and ‘illness’ also prompted an urgent intervention on the part of Ethiopians before Europe’s civilizing mission is also conceived as a sanitizing mission.

Likewise, Michael Tessema, who studied in Europe and later became an employee of the Addis Ababa municipality, posited sanitation (for public health) as one of the four vital sources of “life for all living and dying things” namely “light and heat,” “water,” and “air” (“Filth” 330). “In the modern world,” he writes, “the place of prostitutes is segregated so that they would not mingle with healthy spaces as they are dangerous who would contaminate health people and break young men” (Ibid). Another writer, Michael Makras gives similar prescription in the same newspaper, *Berehan ena Selam*:

It is important to take prostitutes to the outskirts of the town and place them in houses built particularly for this purpose. In order to deter possible quarrelling, guards should look after them. They should be seen by doctors regularly and registered in the document prepared by the state that needs to be verified by the doctor. If prostitutes still sneak into the city, the guards who should catch and either fine or imprison them (253).

Opening every paragraph with *be'seletenew ager* [in the civilized/modern world] and mentioning countries like the U.S.A, Italy, France and Europe in general as models to be mimicked, Michael Tessema discussed six major health problems that he termed “filths”: (1) alcoholism and the need to ban excessive use of alcohol drinks; (2) prostitution and the need to isolate prostitutes, to conduct regular medical examination, and police them with guards; (3) the danger of leprosy to the public and the need to segregate the sufferers; (4) cemeteries and the importance of moving them out of town; and (5) neighborhoods and the need to clean them and to assign patrols; and (6) the need to ban both early marriage and divorce (Ibid).

With respect to the leprosy patients, Michael Makras also states, “it needs to be taken into consideration, today too, that in order to seclude leprosy sufferers and to protect the well-being of the healthy people, the leprosy patients should be kept in an isolated place even though it is difficult to do it at once” (254). In *Berehan ena Selam*, Michael Makras, who frequently advises the public to do as “Europe does,” brings the issues of marriage, venereal disease, prostitution, and leprosy together to advance ideas of holy matrimony, issuance of health certificates, and segregation for the sanitation of the people. Unlike many other writers who discussed issues of alcoholism, leprosy, and sex work separately, Michael Makras connected all together and suggested that leprosy patients could use their money to have sexual intercourse with “healthy women” and transmit the disease to “their children and women” (253). He then proposed segregation and surveillance as governmental mechanisms to contain “prostitution” and “leprosy” (Ibid).

Due to the lack of precise information on leprosy and the inability of scientists to understand the nature of the disease and to know the ways in which it entered into and exited bodies, the representation of leprosy as a threat to the Ethiopian state and the people was incomplete and ambiguous. As Mesele Terecha argues, what is interesting is the fact that this mis/representation “instigated unreasonable fear around the elite circle who were then taking an active part in the discourse of the publication” of *Berehan ena Selam* newspaper (“Leprosy” 57).⁸⁶

However, we need to go beyond judging Melaku Bayen’s and Michael Makras’s explanation of leprosy as “unscientific,” because the discourse of sanitation was invented in the name of what Melaku Bayen calls “educational advancement” and “pharmaceutical science.” Being scientific was discursively aligned with modern pedagogy. Even though both Melaku and Michael Makras refuted the long-held assumption that leprosy was hereditary and came up with what they called “scientific” explanation by referring to *mikrob* (microbes) as the causes of infections.

This term *mikrob* arrived in the Ethiopian public health discourse in the process of translational seduction, which “might divert the language, epistemes, and very being of the dominated to approximate those of the dominator” (Tageldin 13). To paraphrase Tageldin, *mikrob* involved three forms of translations. First, some kind of adaptation transpired through an

⁸⁶ Mesele Terecha’s PhD thesis, “Society Unhealed,” is also a very important work in rethinking Ethiopian studies in that it has cast light on the hitherto unthinkable ‘historical’ subject, leprosy in Ethiopia, through a rigorous research though other attempts have also been made in certain aspects. Interestingly, Mesele aligned the epistemic shift in the ways in which identities of leprosy sufferers have been invented and re/produced with the re/emergence of global political modernity in the beginning of twentieth-century. Yet, the re-inscription of orientalist attitudes when he creates binary between pre and post twentieth century Ethiopia by freezing Ethiopia as a ‘secluded place’ that froze in time hampers the ways in which he engaged with the vast archives he has gathered. Historicist bifurcation of time and reading of the past and modernity hinders his analysis.

interlingual translation of *microbe* to *mikrob*; Second, the “intercultural translation”

carried knowledge of sanitation over into the Ethiopian discourse of *tena* (health), displacing a religious episteme/praxis that considered redemption of one’s soul through giving alms to the leprosy sufferers. Mesele Terecha maps the local knowledge system about this social milieu of leprosy sufferers before the advent of modern technology of power and shows how the Orthodox Christian belief created a condition for embracing the disabled body in the name of spiritual redemption rather than dismembering leprosy patients through segregation (“Unhealed”). This is an important insight to see the invention of the diseased/dangerous body despite Mesele’s suggestion of a unilinear move from ‘heal[ing]’ traditional (religious-cum-social practices) to the modern “unhealed” state of the disabled body; Finally, the arrival of *mikrob* involved a *translation of self* to resemble and catch up with European modernity. The dialectical tension between these translations reveals the chaotic global-local relations at work.

What I am interested in here is that the ways in which issues of poverty, health, sexualization, and commodification of bodies – particularly Ethiopian female bodies – emerged amid and due to the coloniality of power. Cognizant of their conditions, Melaku and his contemporaries framed the question of health as an issue of freedom for Ethiopians who should strive towards building healthy bodies. Whether their analysis and prescription were scientific or not, Melaku Bayen, Michael Makras, and some other intellectuals in the 1920s established the discourse of “scientificity” as one of the tenets of postcolonial desire. Conversing with his contemporaries, the prolific playwright Yoftahe Nigussie cited from and performed that scientificity by blending commodified and sexualized female bodies with the diseased leprosy sufferers. In so doing, theatre and performance participated in the re-invention of the impure

sexualized and commodified body in the middle of Addis Ababa, which was being forced by global powers to put itself on the market.

Performing amid Coloniality of Power: Invention of Ethiopian ‘Impure’ Bodies

Yoftahe Nigussie (1895-1947) was a contributor to *Berehan ena Selam* along with intellectuals like Melaku Bayen and Michael Makras. Yoftahe was highly educated in the Orthodox Christian Church traditional school of poetry and music. He earned the title *qegn geta* (Head of the Right or referring to a clergyman who would stand on the right side of the Head Priest), which shows his prestigious position as a priest in an Orthodox Church. When expatriate teachers at the modern schools, Menelik II and Teferei Mekonnen, invited him to help them fine-tune the Amharic translations of foreign dramas, Yoftahe used the opportunity to learn the art of play writing and staging. Blending his traditional poetry-music education, Yoftahe took the art of the musical play in the 1920s to a different level. In particular, his deep understanding of *qene* (a traditional poetic-performative enterprise with multiple meanings and reflecting multiple epistemes) put him at an advantageous position in using multiple genres of performances as he indigenized the foreign while fleshing out the traditional performatives. Because it speaks to the performance analysis I am giving, Yoftahe’s particular *qene* education, which is of *sem ena worq* (wax and gold), is important here.

The name ‘wax and gold’ can be taken as an analogy of the process of lost-wax casting employed by a goldsmith who casts a duplicate metal sculpture from an original figure. So we can take *wax and gold* as one aspect of *qene* whose three-dimensional negative image is dialectically linked with many intended shapes that came about. Hence, a wax and gold variant of *qene* can deploy at once multiple meanings that run the gamut of double entendre, homonyms,

and polysemy. Being part of the generation that hailed Regent Teferi Mekonnen (who was in 1930 crowned as emperor) as the progressive leader that had to lead Ethiopia, Yoftahe used his poetry, musicals, and plays to advance Teferi Mekonnen's thoughts by staging performances at schools, hotels, and the imperial court. Members of the generation that some foreigners called the Young Ethiopians, Yoftahe included, were concerned with the impinging colonialism as they mimicked European modernity. Yoftahe was indeed deeply disturbed by the shadow of colonialism. His poetry and particularly his play titled *Afajeshign* (Because of You [female gender], I am in Trouble) spoke to that precarious condition of Ethiopia. His play about leprosy sufferers and sexual workers, *Ye'Hizb Tsetset, Ye'Me't Beliyou Gudat* (*The People's Regret, Mrs. Beliyou's Loss*) came in the middle of this situation. The play was staged on August 2, 1934, at Menelik II School. Emperor Haile Selassie, Empress Menen, the heir, ministers and other nobilities watched the play as part of an elaborate birthday celebration for the Emperor. According to the fragmentary excerpts published in *Berehan ena Selam* (Yoftahe 254-255) this is how the story of Yoftahe's play unfolds:

Mr. Bant-Yiketū, enjoying your drink, holding up your glass

May God let you live with Beliyou for a thousand years

[*Azmari* (minstrel) Yigletu performs a praise song.]

Kemsi's friend, Mr. Bant-Yiketū

How sweet is your odor, the scent of your body.

[*Lady* Beliyou throws this couplet to the minstrel]

As in most instances of Ethiopian minstrelsy, *meshetegnogn* – people at a drinking house, who range from the bar maids/bar girls to singers and different customers – participate in the

improvisation of lyrics, singing along with the minstrel(s), snapping their fingers, clapping their hands and dancing. In Yoftahe's play, a minstrel who goes by the name Yigletu; the three women who sell alcoholic drinks – Beliyou, Chekolech, and Ermejachew, customers who are leprosy sufferers – Bant-Yiketü, Kemsî, and Gedlu; and certain “non-sufferer” clients praise each other, composing lyrics impromptu and inviting the *azmari* to sing them.⁸⁷ Creating one front behind the rich leprosy patients, this group confronts the other ‘able bodied’ and ‘neat’ but ‘poor’ customers who have had sexual relations with the barmaids/girls. For them, the *azmari* performance is a battlefield.

Both the minstrel and the bar maid, Lady Beliyou, praise the leprosy patient Bant-Yiketü. When his name is mentioned in the opening lines, it seems that the focus is on Bant-Yiketü (by extension on his friends Kemsî and Gedlu). However, the couplet connects the leprosy-sufferer with *Lady* Beliyou from the start. Through *Lady* Beliyou's verse, the play shows how intimate she is with Bant-Yiketü. She witnesses that the “odor” of Bant-Yiketü's body is “sweet.” This intimacy does not signify a “proper” love affair but invokes fear by showing a promiscuous sexual contact as an embodiment of contagion. That is why the play shows how Bant-Yiketü's sexual affair is not limited to Beliyou. Bant-Yiketü created the following lines in praise of his relation with the other lady, Chekolech:

When we snuggle up to each other

Don't you feel we are the governors/government?! (Ibid)

⁸⁷ Desta Tekle-Wold's Amharic dictionary defines *Mesheta Bet* as a drink house where wantons, adulterers and *q'rewoch* gather (1000). *Q're* [plural, q'rewoch] can be defined as a woman who sells drinks, a singer, a nomadic vocalist, a female vagabond, wanton, a person whose father is not known, a woman who sells drinks/who drinks alcohol at a drink house, songster, prostitute, single woman, a scandalous woman. These words show how women's bodies are historically and materially made many things at once and how the boundaries they inhabit are so fluid. In this particular setting where leprosy sufferers, *azmari*, and other customers meet, it is evident that the playwright is participating in the inventions of sexualization and abnormalization of bodies.

In fact, Bant-Yiketü and his friends are depicted as extravagant people whose ‘audacity’ to walk with pomp and to sleep around knows no bounds. For instance, *Lady Chekolech* gives the next lines to the *azmari* to acclaim Bant-Yiketü’s friend, Kemsî:

He poured money on men and women

The proud young Kemsî, the overblown/blown into pieces. (Ibid)

The other ‘able-bodied’ customers, who are presented as “future sufferers,” admire this spectacle of richness. The “future sufferers” say:

Shower Yigletu and the women with more money

It is better to love each other than to sunder

Mr. Bant-Yiketü, your hand(out) is larger. (Ibid)

The *azmari*, in his turn, focuses on the women to assert that they are meant to be together with the leprosy sufferers no matter what the consequences would be. *Azmari* Yigletu sings, praising Bant-Yiketü:

No one is as generous as you are

You feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty

You are lord of the *arada* (downtown/central market/the modern)

Mrs. Beliyö, let me tell you a life secret,

Mrs. Chekolech, let me tell you a life secret,

Mrs. Ermejachew, let me tell you a life secret,

A flesh ordained to wound would anyway be spoilt. (Ibid)

Because Yoftahe conveys multiple meanings at once, the meanings of the verses in this play cannot be deciphered easily unless the genre of *qene* is taken into consideration. In the *making* of

gene, the composer first presents the *wax* or the frontal meaning and one has to dig deeper to read the innuendoes (with all the historical material relations that inform them). The *wax* in the above excerpt is conveyed to the leprosy sufferer Bant-Yiketu and the three women. The *azmari* admires Bant-Yiketu for being bighearted, particularly, for feeding the starved and quenching the thirst of the poor. Even though the *azmari* calls Bant-Yiketu ‘lord of the town,’ the meaning does not appear as a paradox because it gestures to *gibir mablat* (organizing banquets and feeding people) a social institution in which feudal lords with higher rank feed the society. The *azmari* is likening the leprosy sufferer with a lord. In the last three lines of the above excerpt, each woman is addressed by her name and the minstrel suspends his ‘outsider’ position and intervenes saying that the women should let the leprosy sufferer/s ‘enjoy’ their beauty (sleep with them) because, the last line suggests, beauty ‘would fade away, body would turn into soil anyway.’ The repetition of the words, “let me tell you a life secret,” gives the *azmari*’s message intensity. In fact, the form emanates from the improvisation, that an *azmari* uses as a technique to finish the song in a stronger and creative way. Hence, sexualizing and commodifying the female bodies, the male minstrel seems to advocate for ‘embracing’ the disabled body or the social inclusion of leprosy sufferers.

The *werq* (gold) layer of this play, however, shows other hidden meanings. One meaning reveals how Bant-Yiketu is dangerous to the city since he has become “lord of *arada*.” While the *wax* gives the sense that it is the minstrel who bestows that honorary title in an informal appreciation, a *gold* would entail that Bant-Yiketu himself has assigned himself as the lord of *arada*. The implication is that the leprosy sufferer should not have that kind of social position. The terms ‘lord of *arada*’ show how his social relation is also determined by the conceptual and

geographic space since it entails that he does not belong to *arada* (the center of the city) and to *aradanet* (modernity). He is, thus, excluded from the conceptual and geographic spaces of the modernity that certain intellectual-artists designed.

According to a well-known writer, Mers'e Hazen Wolde Kirkos, who was the playwright's contemporary and colleague, Yoftahe created the character Kemsu (another leprosy sufferer) after being inspired by a "wealthy merchant" who lived in Addis Ababa in the 1920s, selling horse tack like headgear, saddles and saddle pads (Yohannes 79). Mers'e Hazen said that a few wealthy leprosy patients were using their money to corrupt the society, particularly 'with respect to sexual promiscuity.' Hence, they are represented as dangers to the state. This representation of space recurs in the play, as we have seen it in Chekolech's dialogue when she says "Don't you feel we are the governors/government?!" The meaning is that the leprosy sufferers are posing danger to the state itself. In the turn of the 1920s, leprosy sufferers were running away from and refusing to join the state leprosarium. On the other hand, some explorers were advocating for colonizing Ethiopia based on their own premise that Ethiopia would contaminate its neighbors such as the Sudan – Europe's colony.

In the last three lines of the above verse, the female bodies are conceived as bodies that are always already "ordained to wound." The wax (superficial meaning) suggests that human beings are mortal. In performing this verse, the *azmari* is also initiating the female bodies to sleep with Bant-Yiketu implying that there is nothing wrong with having sexual affairs with leprosy sufferers. As much as they are known for their sharp critique against social injustices committed by ordinary people, higher officials and the state, *azmaris* would also reproduce stereotypes in their attempt to get *shilmat* (prize) through exaggerated appreciation of customers

(especially the rich ones) in drinking houses. When a customer is touched by the witty appreciative words of a song he would give money to the performer/s on the spot. He may add more money as the performance unfolds. Hence, the *azmari* in this play participates in the sexualization and commodification of the female bodies as he openly presents an act of “selling their bodies” as a “life secret.” The repetition of the phrase “life secret” and the summoning of the name of each sexual worker deepen his stereotyping. The *wax* is dialectically related with *gold* though. In other words, even though the playwright seems to re-present what is happening between the *azmari* and the female sexual workers by showing how a male performer initiates the women to sell their bodies without discriminating among their ‘customers,’ in the hidden meaning, the female bodies are the ones marked as avaricious. The main theme of the play entails the prospect that a microbe (what Michael Makras called *mikrob*) would infect the sexual workers because they are rapacious to the extent that they would have sexual intercourse with dangerous diseased bodies. In fact, at the end of the play, the leprosy sufferers and other customers clashed and *zebegna* (policemen) arrived hearing Mrs. Beliyou’s shouts. Bant-Yiketu and his friends took their money back from the women appealing to the policemen that they were robbed. While every customer went out, the women were taken to *komisaria* (police station) (81).

These multiple ironies begin with the names of the characters. *Bant-Yiketu* means let the people suffer because of you. Though *Beliyou* is a name given to a person (female and male) who is considered to be a ‘special gift,’ the playwright uses it to obliquely show how that ‘special gift’ would ultimately be spoilt by its contact with diseased bodies. The title, *The People’s Regret, Mrs. Beliyou’s Loss*, shows how Beliyou loses her body, therefore, how she

corrupts her body. More important, though, that “loss” also harms other people since it is through her body that poison flows to contaminate a healthy public. Hence, the second phrase in the title, *Mrs. Beliyou’s Loss*, refers at once to her own disintegration and the damage she brings to the whole society. *Chekolech* refers to her careless behavior; while *Ermejachew* literally means “step on them,” a reference to her avarice that blinds her in her desire to amass money at the expense of the people. While playing with the names could be a simple sarcastic gesture, the playwright uses dialogues to complicate his techniques. For instance, when Chekolech admires Bant-Yiketu’s friend Kemsi, she says “The proud young Kemsi, the overblown.” The term overblown does not only indicate his overindulgence but also his pretentiousness. More important, sarcastic tone enters with the term *yetebetatesew* (blown into pieces) as it implies that his body is dwindling and crumbling. Similar double meaning is at work when the customers say:

It is better to love each other than to sunder

Mr. Bant-Yiketu, your hand(out) is larger.

The term ‘sunder’ signifies *separation* and *breaking down* of a body. At the same time, in Amharic, when one says someone’s hand/finger is larger or longer, it implies that the person is generous. Using this double meaning, the playwright is implicitly – through irony and sarcasm – attacking the leprosy patients’ bodies. These ironies and sarcasms are not always easy to be perceived. Hence, the *qe’ne* serves as a dramatic irony whose meaning is discerned through a critical reading. After all, as the title of the play, *The People’s Regret, Mrs. Beliyou’s Loss*, makes it clear, the audience/the people at large and the state in particular are the ones whose moral and bodily health are to be protected.

Yoftahe was one of the people responsible for introducing a new mechanism of exclusion that would separate sexual workers and leprosy sufferers from other members of the society. According to the actors, the audience received the play very well. Of course the idea of safeguarding public health had been in circulation for quite some time. In 1901, *Ras Mekonnen*, the father of Emperor Haile Selassie and the governor of Harar under Emperor Menelik's rule, had already assisted the French Roman Catholic missionaries to establish the first leprosarium in Harar, which was known as the St. Anthony Leprosarium.⁸⁸

In relation to the notion and practice of segregation, Merab also writes that *Azmari* (Minstrel) Tsadiqe and other singers were “generally celebrated courtesans.” He also mentioned that Menelik II bestowed on Tsadiqe the title of *Woizero* (Lady) after her heroic deed at the battle of Adwa. She was assigned as the “director of all the beauties” (Merab 289). Tekle-Hawariat Tekle-Mariam (1884-1977) also mentions the existence of sexual workers' neighborhood, which was named after Tsadiqe (257). A certain Haile Mariam Gameda wrote that Menelik II (1889-1913) “followed the modern peoples' order” and moved Addis Ababa's “prostitutes” to a separate place called *azmari Tsadiqe* neighborhood.⁸⁹ It seems that this

⁸⁸ Mesele Terecha critically engaged with the notion of “Christian compassion” by looking into how the French missionaries used “aid” at the leprosarium to convert the “unfortunates” and “poor lepers” into fortunate Christians. Future engagements will further the discussion by entangling issues of race, religion, coloniality and global-local empires. See, for instance, Fanon *Wretched*; Gussow; Edmond; Moran.

⁸⁹ Haile-Mariam writes: “We see in most of the historical writings done by foreigners, and we believe it is true, that from ancient times until the battle of Adwa the Ethiopian people had prudence, tight marriage system, good upbringing and behavior and they were able to be utterly healthy. Since the battle of Adwa, for the health of the Ethiopian people at large and of the city dwellers in particular not to be contaminated by the disease brought by *galamotoch* (prostitutes), Emperor Menelik, follow[ed] the modern peoples' order. [So] elderlies have it that those prostitutes found in Addis Ababa were gathered in one place and neighborhood being secluded from the rest of the city residents and given a place around a district called *Gedam Sefer* under the administration of a woman called *azmari* (minstrel) Tsadiqe. Hence, we can see that there was a better management of prostitutes than today.” Haile-Mariam Gameda. “Tiqit Sile Ethiopia Hizb Teninet” [Brief Note on the Health of Ethiopian People], *Ye'Eritrea Dimits* [Voice of Eritrea], 2, 49 (September 1946), 201. There was a neighborhood, known by *Tadiqe Sefer*, where “setegna adariwoch”

neighborhood established between *arada* (the city center that later became Piazza) and Lagar, was forgotten at the beginning of 1940s. It must be noted that neither Merab nor Tekle-Hawariat saw the place as segregated as a site of exclusion. Even Merab states that Emperor Menelik ennobled *azmari* Tsadiqe. Despite the fact that Tekle-Hawariat considered those kinds of spaces, including *azmari* performance (*azmarinet*) as sites of ill repute and laziness, the designated Emperor Iyasu IV and his advisor *azmari* Tessema Eshete (one of the minstrels who ascended to higher positions) saw nothing ill and embarrassing about these places.

As far as the segregation of leprosy sufferers is concerned, Michael Makras mentioned in *Berehan ena Selam* that Emperor Menelik “considered and erected a house [for leprosy sufferers] in an isolated place in *Debre Libanos*.” Yet Mesele writes that Emperor Menelik found the idea of segregating leprosy sufferers sinful (qtd in Mesele *Leprosy* 43).⁹⁰ In the mid-1920s, Empress Zewditu built a “leper asylum” though it was not used because “most of the [leprosy sufferers] disappeared and as the few who could be found strongly resisted being put into isolation” (Weqneh Eshetu qtd in Garretson 136).⁹¹ At the same time, another leprosarium known as the Agostino Chigi Institute was established in the northern part of Ethiopia, Tigray at Seleqlaqa (Price qtd in Mesele 206). Thus the segregation of leprosy patients, like that of the sexual workers, was a new and a highly unstable institution, introduced and influenced by Europeans forces.

[sexual workers] used to live despite the fact that no place is known by this name in Addis Ababa today. Tekle-Hawariat *Autobiography* 257.

⁹⁰ It needs also to be noted that the first leprosarium was founded during the reign of Emperor Menelik.

⁹¹ Mesele Terecha errs in saying that “leprosy patients were roaming freely in Addis Ababa” before the establishment of the Princess Zenebework Leprosarium. What strikes me here is that these developments created anxiety on the part of writers like Yoftahe Nigussie who presented the issue as minatory even after the founding of Princess Zenebework Leprosarium.

Issues of alcoholism, scandalous sexual contacts, venereal diseases, leprosy, and other health matters were some of the topics that *Berehan ena Selam* writers seriously reflected on. Yoftahe participated in these kinds of debates through writing articles and staging plays. For example, Melaku Beyan and Michael Tessema discussed issues of health in general as a postcolonial question of freedom and Michael Makras presented problems of leprosy, venereal disease, prostitution and leprosy tangentially reflecting on the relation between sexual contact and leprosy. But it was Yoftahe Nigussie who strongly entangled issues of ‘leprosy’ and ‘promiscuous sexual affairs’ both as threats to the people as well as to the state.

Yoftahe’s play, *The People’s Regret, Mrs. Beliyou’s Loss* is deeply grounded in the construction of a wider postcolonial discourse of modernity. It participated in translations of language of segregation from Europe, a colonialist power that Ethiopian intellectuals wanted to fight against at another level. The contradictions abound, rendering the discourse and practice of sanitization and order ubiquitous and shaky at once.

(Don’t) Get out of the Town: Ambivalent Relations

Taddesse: [Dear judges] What we are kindly asking for is that there should be a way in which these city vagabonds would leave the town with their music that disturbs our nights and we look for a resolution that would protect us from any blame.

Tsige: (Amazed) Here we go! What a request of judgment is that! You want to live in the city as if it were only yours? Why didn’t you ask the judges then to banish us from the entire country?

Ayelech: (Feeling sad) Why didn't you ask the judges to banish us from the entire country?! Eh? You have considered us as a defiled object?! You – our educated brother – is that the maximum scope of your knowledge? Who would replace us and sell drinks? Men?! (Getachew D. 104).⁹²

When *Yasqemetut Wonde'late* (Living with a Cougar), a play from which I have taken the above excerpts, was staged in 1963, the Addis Ababa municipality had already instituted the idea that sexualized and commodified bodies should be segregated. The municipality had already rehearsed and mastered policing the city by either *yeketema zebegnoch* (city guards) or *yemoral guad* (moral squad) and/or regular police force that decided who should live and walk where, when, and in which parts of the city/country (Michael T. 330-331; "Letter from Kentiba," "Letter from Dr. Haile-Giorgis"). The image of sexualized, raced (for *kilis setoch* [mixed race women] were differently marked in the postcolony), and disabled bodies (mainly leprosy sufferers); unemployed youth; and beggars and the other déclassé as scandalous *objects* who must be "removed," emerged in literature and performances, even those that seemed sympathetic towards "sex workers." Women of the red-light districts, cognizant of that history and its representations, responded by staging their resistance, making use of the means available to them.

Asegedech Alamrew, the owner of Patrice Lumumba bar, which 'honored' men frequented and where many would-be superstars began their musical careers in the 1940s,

⁹² The play was staged one year before its publication. Getachew Debalqe, the playwright said that he used the relationship between a young educated man who preferred to live with an older woman just as "an initial idea" to show how life obliged women to become "sex workers" and how "men put the blame on women saying that it was women who do not want to be married" while it was men "who failed to know what it meant to respect and be respected." Getachew D *Living with a Cougar* 6-9.

in her discussion with journalist and writer Paulos Gnogno, said the following about male writers who misrepresented sexual workers:

[...] Spending his time with us night after night, a dramatist will say on the morrow that ‘it is bad to go to a prostitute’s house.’ Don’t they have other subjects than us? I think they continue to make our lives a topic because they love us. We have become a testing ground for all writers who make us an issue for their writing, be it a book, a play, or a newspaper article. If we frustrate a writer’s expectations with our answer, he would say ‘just wait and see what I write for the newspaper.’ Yet whatever he writes, it is frivolous. The theatres are all the same. They’ve made us into a basic writers’ workshop. (*Amba* 11) ⁹³

What prompted Paulos Gnogno’s interview with Asegedech and other women within and outside of red-light districts were the writings and performances of the 1950s, which were for or against sexualized and commodified women of the red-light districts.⁹⁴ Grabbing the opportunity offered by a male journalist, women who owned bars in the red-light

⁹³ Getachew Debalqe’s *Living with A Cougar* came earlier than Paulos Gnogno’s work and these two writers were close friends who collaborated on theatrical productions.

⁹⁴ Let us take a look at repertoires and publications from the 1920s – 1960s: Amharic plays like *Gonderew Gebre-Mariam* (Gebre-Mariam, the Gondarine), *Ye’Hizb Tsetset*, *Ye’Meyet Beliyu Gudat* (The People’s Regret, Lady Beliou’s Loss), *Zetegn Fetena Yalefe Jegna* (A Hero who Overcomes Tons of Obstacles), *Qey Mebrat* (Red Light), *Ye’Lijagered Saloon* (Girls’ Saloon), *Yeshe* (name that translates to ‘A woman for thousands of men’), *Dehna Hugn Arada* (Goodbye Downtown); Amharic novels such as *Endewotach Kerech* (A Woman Lost Forever), *Ye’Enba Debdabewoch* (Tearful Letters), *Setegna Adari* (Prostitute), *Abaten Nigerign* (Tell Me Who My Father Is) and the first Amharic film, *Hirut, Abatwa Manew?* (Hirut, Who Is Her Father?); and Tigrigna novels published in Asmara such as *Ay’neberkun* (I Did Not Exist), *Weteto Endaboy Andu* (The He-goat of Father Andu’s Household), *Wa’y Ane Deqey! Se’an Mimilkat d’o* (Alas! My Children! For Want of Drawing Attention to), *Ay’wereskun* (I Haven’t Inherited), *Men’do Belegna* (Who’s the Offender?), *Worq’ha* (a name), *Mishit Mishit Mer’a* (Every Night, A Wedding Night), and others. See Hager Fikir Theatre “*Special Issue*”; Fekadu & Etenesh. “Ye’Ethiopia Be’herawi Theatre”; Demissew “Setegna Adarinet Be’arat Ye’amarigna Rejim Liboledoch Wist.” [Prostitution in Four Amharic Novels]. BA Thesis.

districts, including the renowned ones like Asegedech Alamrew, voiced their resistance to dominant – and male-dominated – discourses about sexual workers.

Asegedech Alamrew's sarcastic words show the intensity of official writings that monumentalized the issue of "prostitution" as a scandalous space in the nation. Her reflection helps us unsettle any representation of the empire as a system that tolerated women like her. Asegedech's intervention, however, goes beyond that. She challenged the authorities who controlled how women should be represented on the state-owned stages, in newspapers and in books. Her words show how the representation of female bodies by male writers is already paradoxical. She obliquely says that male writers of cultural productions hide their own participation in "prostitution" but they single out female bodies to mark and denigrate as scandalous. When Asegedech says, "Don't they have other subjects than us? I think they continue to make our lives a topic because they love us," she allows us to see the ambivalent relationships and the tensions between ordinary men and the patriarchal state on the one hand and women in the red-light districts on the other.

Whereas many male writers and performers produce during the day (their formal working hours) a number of novels, plays, and journalistic articles to represent the sexual female body as the social evil of the nation, they frequent red-light districts at night. While the state investigates, names the female bodies 'impure,' and maps the cities to exclude sexualized bodies from their 'pure' areas, it extracts taxes and even ab/uses the female sexual workers' bodies to lure some African diplomats and leaders and confirm Ethiopia's position as the leader of Pan-Africaism. For instance, the Ugandan Prime

Minister Milton Obote appreciated the Ethiopian government at the ‘historic’ Founding Conference of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) on May 20, 1963, for “looking after [the African dignatories] day and night.” His remark caused roaring laughter in the conference room. Bereket Habte Selassie, who was Ethiopia’s Attorney General by then and participated in finalizing a draft charter for the establishment of the OAU, writes that the “Ethiopian government had indeed looked after the guests day and night. The mirth was due to the fact that the female population of the ‘Red-Light District’ in Addis Ababa had been mobilized to serve their country and Emperor under the able hand of one Asegedech Alamiro, chief madam of the district” (188-189). These ‘love-hate’ relations between the heteropatriarchal regime and sexual workers reveal the instability of the discourse and practice of sanitation and order.

Moreover, Asegedech critiqued the male writers’ works as “frivolous.” From these engagements, one can also infer that Asegedech was not ‘uninformed docile’ body whose subjectivity begins and ends in the nocturnal life of the red-light district. She was actively attending to and evaluating stage performances as well as writings. To say that the cultural productions of male writers are “frivolous” is to expose how they do not capture the complexities of the sexual workers’ lives. In spite of the challenges such representations of social spaces posed against sexualized and commodified bodies, not only celebrity madams like Asegedech Alamrew but also highly marginalized sexual workers kept on *walking* in the edges and rough alleys of empire.

Walking: In the City that Banishes Her

In order to understand what Ethiopian female performers and other sexualized and

commodified women did with their rituals of traversing the city, I use *walking* as a methodology of space making or what Henri Lefebvre calls representational space, which prompts the tactical *use* of social space with all its “poetry” and “affective kernel” (42, 232). In refracting the gaze of power that fixes its eyes down on marked bodies from atop, Michel de Certeau posits walking as a tactic of subversion. He has the following to say about what a *walker* in a city *does*:

[T]he walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else. And if on the one hand [she] actualizes only a few of the possibilities fixed by the constructed order ([she] goes only here and not there), on the other [she] increases the number of possibilities (for example, by creating shortcuts and detours) and prohibitions (for example, [she] forbids [her]self to take paths generally considered accessible or even obligatory). (*Everyday* 98)

This *walking* is performative in that it defies the imposition of dis/placement through constant embodied recreation of detours and creative use of social space. Yet, the fact that I intervened to change the pronoun in this excerpt tells us a lot about the vitality of understanding the “genital” make up of the walker and how that would inform the manners of walking, and also inter/subjective relations. Whose body is walking? How? When? and Where? These are important questions to ask. That is why Elizabeth Grosz argues that “corporeality in its sexual specificity may be seen as the material condition of subjectivity” by showing the importance of gender and sexuality in making the body – flesh and blood – a body (31). In this regard, Marta Savigliano’s understanding of the ways in which a female body *walks*, which resists any arrival as a noun but appreciates

action, is important. Sylvia Wynter would call it poetic praxis. In a Fanonian expression, Wynter says that *being human* or what we can call *becoming human* is inserting invention into existence. Through invocation of a literal and figurative poetic praxis of freedom, that is what Savigliano does in her theoretical-performative walking/working, *Angora Matta*. She, a performing/thinking body:

Walks with the buttocks forgotten.

Walks with the thighs in anguish.

Walks on flooring always new and always broken.

Walks with hoarse things in mind.

Walks in step with the roaring shouts.

Walks with the scent of the red hurricane.

Walks in between the eyes of the beholder.

Walks breaking the curfew. (*Angora Matta* 234)

Savigliano's poetic theory shows how the female body "walks on flooring always new and always broken [sic]" and "with the thighs in anguish" implying the long, thigh chafing, arduous walks on rugged paths that irritate her flesh. For a sexed, gendered, and raced body, the "anguish" is not just about friction of her own thighs but also about a corporeal wound caused by global-local historical social conditions. Yet, the body in this story/theory is not doomed but creatively finds ways to walk "breaking the curfew."

Asnakech Worku, the well-known dancer, actor, and musician who joined professional theatre from *wube bereha*, used to have a ritual of *walking* in the *arada* (downtown) of Addis:

Asnakech *walks* from *Wube Bereha* [the in/famous location where she had her own bar] to St. George church looking right and left *as if* no passerby sees her and she doesn't notice. Then she hurries down to Piazza window-shopping until she arrives at King George Bar. While she is walking, both women and men gaze at her body admiring her elegance, dress, walking style, her leg and hip. They wanted to be *like* her. (Getachew D *Asnakech* 47)

That was Asnakech's ritual of *walking* in the 1960s and 1970s. It is the acclaimed Ethiopian actor and playwright (*Living with A Cougar* being one of his plays) and her long time friend Getachew Debalqe, who wrote Asnakech's biography, who narrated this story of walking. Whereas the state continuously attempts to expel her (and other women of the red-light districts) to the outskirts of the city, Asnakech strides on the very main avenues with poise *showing* herself to fellow travelers. This performance of "walking to be seen *as if* the walker does not notice" was directed, accentuated, and performed by the very female body who controlled the way she would be seen. This is what Abigail Solomon-Godeau calls *self-representation* (274).

The areas around St. George's Cathedral of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church were the centers of the capital in those days, though red-light districts gradually started to mushroom in various parts of the town. The city considered St. George Church, the statue of Menelik II (erected to commemorate the victory of Adwa in which Ethiopians militarily defeated Italians in 1896), buildings around Piazza (the place into which the "natives" were not allowed to enter during the Italian colonial occupation of 1935-1941),

the ‘modern’ stores that Asnakech was window-shopping, and bars like King George to be landmarks of the downtown. The municipality wanted to demolish the ordinary bars like the one Asnakech had in *wube bereha* from these spaces. However, Asnakech and other women of the red-light districts, who were under the constant gaze of the state, manipulated the state’s projects of modern mapping and the *panopticon* gaze (seeing down without being seen) through *walking* and refracting that gaze (Foucault *Discipline and Punish*; Certeau).

Asnakech was also marked racially. Many called Asnakech *Kilisua* or *Talianua* (*the mixed-race woman* or *the Italian* due to her light skin color). Asnakech claimed her sister and other relations had light skin color, suggesting that she was neither a child of an Italian (thereby a result of the recent colonial sexual encounter) nor a daughter of any foreigner. Yet, the name *talianua* (the Italian woman) persisted in her everyday life in a pejorative manner.⁹⁵ The late journalist-writer Paulos Gnogno brought this issue that Asnakech had to grapple with into a play he wrote about the daily life of artists under Haile Selassie I. Paulos wrote a naturalist play called *Ye’Sekaram Shengo* (A Council of Drunkards) in which he re/presented the artists’ everyday life without even changing their real names. It was not just that the artists played their own ‘selves.’ In this play, one of the re/presentations that the playwright used to depict Asnakech Worku’s lived experience was the invocation of her raced subjectivity. The play aligned Asnakech with

⁹⁵ Telela told me that there were colleagues at Haile Selassie I theatre who used to insult Asnakech by this name. There were also times in which male actors insulted her as a sexualized woman who should sleep with every man she encountered. Yet, Asnakech was known of resistance. She physically confronted these men and at times suffered the consequences. For instance, quarrelling with another well-known actor/dancer/head of a dance department, Asnakech was obliged to leave the Haile Selassie I theatre and moved to Love of the Country/Patriotic Association theatre and then to the National Guard Music orchestra. It was later on that Asnakech was able to come back to Haile Selassie I theatre.

Marilyn Monroe due to the modern sensibilities that she mimicked from that Hollywood star.⁹⁶

However, a male character addresses Asnakech as Marilyn Monroe not to refer to her manner but to refer to her light skin color and thereby hurl a racial slur, implying that she is neither Ethiopian nor *ferenj* (white). Asnakech replies in the play that she is “authentically Ethiopian.”⁹⁷ Because she is foreignized, Asnakech is pushed to the edge, so much so that she has to claim ‘authenticity’ in her racial identity. Despite the fact that the discourse of color gradation in the local discourse may not always be denigrating and oppressive (it needs to be noted here that societies with darker skin color have been more marginalized in Ethiopia), the Italian colonial rule in Ethiopia (1935-1941) left its marks in the postcolony. Mixed race children and adults in particular were vulnerable to discrimination, and public discourse marked them as dangers to the society and to the state (“protection of race” 411). Hence, the very claim that Asnakech makes eliciting the notion of ‘authenticity,’ shows that the discourse of race already fractures her identity.

When she walked in Piazza streets carrying such weights of history on her body, Asnakech saw the people who were gazing at her but she used to pretend that she did not. In the ordinary street *walk*, she “look[ed] right and left *as if* no passerby [saw] her,” *as if* “she [didn’t] notice” their gaze. At another level, the state gazed at her as a “scandalous sex worker” who would contaminate the nation’s ‘morality, law, order and image.’ The city focused its panopticon gaze from its municipal building, which architecturally looks

⁹⁶ Various people used different names to describe Asnakech’s body and her place in Ethiopian social relations: Marilyn Monroe/ a woman of many loves, Elizabeth Taylor, Cleopatra and/or an Egyptian Belly-Dancer, Edith Piaf, Billie Holiday and Don Juan to mention but a few. See Getachew *Living; Asnakech*; Alemneh; “Ethiopia’s Édith Piaf”; Rachel Samuel Asni.

⁹⁷ Interview with Getachew Debalqe and Telela Kebede.

like a man who stretched his hands and legs wide open on the 140,000 square meter area. Spreading its body in a massive area in a very masculine way, the building erects its modernist clock tower in its pelvic floor. The metaphorical puppeteer behind the turret clock played the musical phrase marking unilinear time to remind the people to hurry and catch up with modernity.⁹⁸ While the municipality was managing the spaces of the city through “regime work” in view of becoming a “metropolis and Africa’s moral capital,” Asnakech walked in the streets manipulating the gazes of the state and her fellow travellers, pretending *as if* she did not see them, playing *as if* she did not see them seeing her. This is at once an act of resilience and resistance against multiple structures of power, be it state spatial order or everyday mundane challenges.

Asnakech’s walk in the city was not an isolated act but related to other women’s walks in the town. Traversing through the turbulent times and spaces of the Italian invasion, Merry Armde preceded Asnakech in developing tactics of survival in the *arada* (downtown) where she established herself as a well-known *kirar* player, as well as the owner of a beauty salon and of a night club with striptease. Merry also prided herself on bringing to Addis Abeba the red (and other) lights to the city – that is, the practice of club and striptease – and on preparing and renting wedding dresses. She was known for, in Solomon-Godeau’s terms, the “self-representation” of her body walking in the city. Merry’s walk in the town was different, however. Because she walked and danced with a slight limp, Merry used to walk wearing long and mostly white dresses to cover her legs. She also needed to explain the causes of her disability by telling different conflicting

⁹⁸ One of the mottos that was hung on one of the buildings in Piazza read “Time is Gold, Use It, Don’t Let it Use You!” This ethos of time was performed mainly at Love of the Country theatre, which used that motto as one guiding principle. (“Stage and State”)

stories, even lies. Thus, Merry would tell a journalist that she had been shot in her leg during the second Italo-Ethiopian war in which she “participated” as a thirteen-year-old girl, encouraging the rest of patriots to fight with valor.⁹⁹ In another interview, she said that she injured her right leg when she was riding a bicycle while drunk after a bicycle competition at the Gefersa Park in the outskirts of Addis (“Ye Merry Weg”). Yet, Merry continued to negotiate dominant narratives of the ‘able-bodied’ through invention of stories as she negotiated the streets through cautiously styled walks. She walked and danced, anyways.

Telela Kebede, another singer, actress, and dancer who joined the red-light bar business later on in the 1970s, told me that Asnakech’s friends from *wube bereha* also used to go out to the city for a *walk*. Their *walks* had multiple purposes. Telela says:

Asnakech likes to be seen and knows how to achieve that. However, other well-known sex workers of *wube bereha* like Asegedeche Alamirew used to walk in the street being followed by their *ashashachoch* [freelance prostitutes]. They did that to show their elegance, modern costumes and make-up, which they mimicked from American films. In fact, they also used that technique to attract clients to *wube bereha* although *madams* like Asegedeche Alamirew, who were highly respected, did not want to do that. Even though I didn’t join *yebuna bet sira* [the bar business] yet, I used to walk a lot with friends. We even bought a different kind of flip flop so as to produce sounds with our footsteps and to attract attentions.

⁹⁹ This came up when a journalist from Radio Ethiopia interviewed her during the the time of the Marxist junta when she was a bedridden patient and no one was helping her as her adopted son was in a battlefield fighting in a civil war.

For these women, *walking* was practicing places, to use de Certeau's terms. As Savigliano notes, heteropatriarchal power locates marginalized bodies in "the space of alterity" while the same power "longs for" the body it already banished (*Tango* 10). While power desired to fix the women in time (nocturnally) and in place (red-light district), they were on the streets; went to the movies, theatres, night clubs, churches and *equb* (a traditional banking system in which people get together); and met with their families and friends.

Of course, as some of them used the praxis of traversing social spaces to "attract clients," these *walks* also cite from and feed into the fetishization of the female sexualized body, and it seems that the sexual workers look for a male gaze. Nevertheless, as much as they participated in reproduction of heteropatriarchal discourse, these women were not passive observers of "specularization" or "the struggle for dominance over spectacle" (*Sexual Suspects* 151-152). They also developed a "look" in the eyes of "spectatorial authority" as Kristina Straub would have it (Ibid).

The streets were not, at the same time, devoid of obstacles. Street harassment was part of the everyday life that women had to pass through. Telela remembers:

But, there was this thing called *hug and kiss* on the street. A man would just appear on my way and just *hug and kiss* a woman and his male friends would roar with laughter. They made a game for quite some time and the male actors of the municipality were part of it. I was highly respected because I would physically fight with men. Once, one of them came out of nowhere and tried to kiss me. I beat him and his friends rather laughed at

him. However, that was not always the case and always true for all of us.

The fact that we knew they would be waiting for us made us nervous.

Many times we take new detours.

Indeed, the violence that disturbed the walks of these women was not only economic but also corporeal. That is why Savigliano says:

Walks with hoarse things in mind.

Walks in step with the roaring shouts.

Walks with the scent of the red hurricane.

Walks in between the eyes of the beholder. (*Angora Matta*)

In these precarious everyday movements, hope is a social reality that the women themselves produced, walking in the roundabouts and breaking the various imposed curfews and hurdles that wound their flesh. If walking is a tactic that allowed them to manipulate the gazes of power in the everyday, making a new detour around persistent vestiges of that power becomes necessary. It is through such detours that women of the red-light districts made it to the theatres and participated as spect-actors in the production of meanings, and thereby, as subjectivities.

Spect-Actors: Between Theatres and Red-light Districts

In the wake of five years of Italian occupation, performance was mobilized by the state to reorder a country stricken hard by colonialism, despite its brief rule, and to recreate the New Ethiopia from the deep crisis if not the ashes of the past. It would take place in one of the two theatres, established as a consequence of the power struggle between the returnees from exile and the guerilla freedom fighters: Hager Fikir Theatre

(Love of the Country) and the Municipality Music and Theatre Popularization. In fact, Love of the Country was originally established on the eve of the Italo-Ethiopian war on July 18, 1935, to fight against Italian propaganda. A freedom fighter called Mengesha Kefela reinvented it after the liberation, despite the fact that Haile Selassie's trusted figure, Mekonen Habte Wold (a returnee from exile in Paris) opted to use Love of the Country as a cultural space where Ethiopia would 'rebuild its unity' between various divided/disenfranchised groups like Muslims; promote the reunion of Eritrea with Ethiopia; and advance some Christian moral ethos, self-reliance and market-take over from foreigners, and work ethic. The Municipality mostly focused on staging modern music including march band performances, and on staging historical plays that remembered colonial times and atrocities, as well as social dramas. Being close to Piazza and to the in/famous *wube bereha* (The Beautiful Desert or Desert), women who came from the *Desert* frequented these theatres. Tracy Davis theorizes such spaces as "semiotic neighborhoods" which were "close in fact" and shared some similar performatives of passion and desire (81-83).

On many occasions, women from the *Desert*, including those celebrity madams such as Asegedech Alamrew, played minor roles at the Municipality theatre. Male actors/directors of the newly established theatres also recruited performers from the Desert. In my conversation with Solomon Deressa (a poet, journalist and intellectual who had lived in Minnesota for more than four decades), Sebhat Gabre-Egzieabher (the late prolific author who wrote a novel on the *Desert*) and Tesfaye Gessesse (an actor, director, playwright, poet and translator), they indicated to me that the theatres did not have a

choice but to employ the women from the well-known *wube bereha* for they had modern artistic sensibilities. Asnakech Worku (the late celebrity actress who had huge talent and skill) told me that she used to win almost every dance competition at the Municipality while she had a “kiosk” she called “Desert” in English. Once she came to the Municipality theatre and acted in the play titled *Ye’Fikir Chora* (Spark of Love), which changed the style of a stage that previously had mostly been filled with historical and religious theatrical productions, Asnakech never left theatre arts. Even though she worked at the theatre, she continued to move between Desert and the Theatre, because the theatre paid a minimal salary only. The conditions at the theatre were such that Asnakech would sometimes need to buy costumes for the characters she played because the theatre could not afford to do so.

One of the widely acclaimed plays in which Asnakech played was Getachew Debalqe’s *Living with a Cougar*. Impersonating a character who works in a red-light district, Asnakech embodied both her own and Ayelech’s experience. In the play, Ayelech says:

You see?! Mere talk is not enough. (Thinking loud and feeling bitter) In order for you to force us to leave the town, what kind of livelihood have you – our young brother – created for us? How can we sustain our lives? Have you ever planned with a government institution to establish for us a factory, an association, an expansion of education led by a women’s union or vocational trainings? Does talking alone have any value? We cannot

survive hunger. How can we live? When we face problems we do not have resources at our disposal to do various works unlike men. [...]

Do you think that [sex work] is a heritage that we've possessed? We started it because it is easier to get into, as it doesn't demand a qualification, no one asks a guarantee for, not something for which one should pay a bribe and because we should not starve to death. What kind of verdict are you all passing on us? Tell us to do something and we will vow in front of the judges that we stop working at drinking houses.

(Getachew D. *Cougar* 100-101)

When Asnakech enacted this monologue on the stage of Haile Selassie I theatre, she was exposing the system that was relentlessly working to banish her body and making her life precarious. Hundreds of women from *wube bereha* and other red-light districts flocked to the Haile Selassie theatre to watch *Living with A Cougar*. They witnessed Ayelech say the words that resonated well with their experiences. It was a woman from a red-light district, the famous Asnakech Worku, who personified their lives. They supported Ayelech/Asnakech by clapping whenever she challenged the patriarchal male characters and shouted at male characters who belittle the position of sexual workers in the society (Conversations with Getachew Debalqe).

The women from different red-light districts were not simply watching the play. They were involved in accentuating Ayelech's/Asnakech's words, gestures, verbal and physical confrontations with the patriarchal male characters. While they clapped for the female characters to show their support, the women shouted at the male characters who

would ridicule women and champion segregation. In so doing, they highlighted, and more than that, participated in shaping the meanings of the play. To borrow Augusto Boal's term, they were spect-actors who participated in the performance through active engagement.

For Asnakech, Ayelech's character resonated with her. Given that she was moving between her *kiosk* at *wube bereha* and the Haile Selassie I theatre, part of Ayelech was Asnakech. Her performance was an imagined as well as an embodied reality. For instance, the moneylender who abused Ayelech even after she paid her debt back was not entirely fictitious because Asnakech and some spectators knew an individual usurer in *wube bereha* who exploited and committed violence against them. Extending the implications and sources of abuse to the larger societal and inter/national levels, the play opened avenues to show how Ayelech was confronted with questions of being human, or sacrifice in the name of the family and the nation:

Yemane: (Laughing out loud): Hahahaha! It's hilarious! Hahahaha! It's hilarious! Hear the news and live with it. Mr. Kibret said that today is the payment due date for you too unless this woman goes out with him!! Hahaha. Hey woman, get up and go to him! (the people in the room were dumbfounded).

Ayelech: I wish I were not born! (Crying) I wish I had been dead like my relations. [To the other people in the room] Please advise me, how can I get out of this trap?

Yemane: Didn't I hear you [prostitutes] say that you would sleep even with a dog provided that it gives you money? Go for it, he will pay you.

Ayelech: Anything can happen but this. I won't do it.

Gelagay: Listen my daughter. This is martyrdom. Be the sacrifice for the sake of your [godparents]. Being a martyr is not just about giving your neck up and being slaughtered by a knife. If you turn this blessed refusal into sacrifice, then it will have value. Who won't die for his father's estate, for his land? Would there be anyone, who is not ready to die for his country? Relinquishing a land for a rival amounts to abandoning a nation to an invader. (42-43)

Kibret, now offstage, is the moneylender, who is forcing Ayelech to sleep with him because her godparents are not able to pay him back today. Yemane, who is the son of Ayelech's godparents, has not been able to rescue his family's land that Kibret has held as collateral. In another plot line, the playwright shows the conflict between Ayelech and Yemane, who lives with a certain 'old' woman depending on her income rather than using his education to secure a lot for himself. Ayelech, on the other hand, has paid off her deceased parents' debt by surviving the harsh life at nightclubs. However, her godparents fail to repay their loan because their son could help neither himself nor his mother and father. The lender threatens to sell the land of Ayelech's godparents, unless she agrees to sleep with him. The lender's abuse and Yemane's contemptuous verbal assault show the banality of hetero-patriarchal violence. Ayelech refuses. It is at this point that Yemane calls her a "dog." Ejected from the social space of humanity, the

marginalized body is reduced to having animal status. Power wants a female body as an object. It rejects her when she asserts her subjectivity as a dignified person. It longs for her as it evicts her, Savigliano would say. It is this kind of denigration that urges Ayelech to resentfully ask: What does it mean to be human? “[My life] has become bitterer than a taste of *aloe vera*. It makes me hate my woman-ness nay my whole humanity” (52).

Except her male grandparent, the rest of the characters force Ayelech to go and sleep with the moneylender, Kibret. She refuses. Gelagay seems to accept her “refusal” when he calls her action “blessed.” It appears that this family embraces the dignity of Ayelech. Yet, the language of martyrdom is invoked to force Ayelech ‘transcend’ the question of human dignity. Her response is clear: “Anything can happen but this. I won’t do it.” Yet the so-called family members push her over the edge when they continue to insist that she has to “sacrifice herself” for the family. To normalize this idea of “sacrifice,” Gelagay alludes to the discourse of nationalism. He says, “Relinquishing a land for a rival amounts to abandoning a nation to an invader” (43). The scene ends there. Black out.

When the lights go out, the play does not just leave us in suspense but also invites us to think out loud about many things including Ethiopian/African nationalisms that produced credence at the expense of female bodies.¹⁰⁰ Sexualized and commodified female bodies were indeed circulated in national and Pan-African spaces in the name of nationalism. Ayelech was being interpollated as a warrior of the state. Not to comply with this narrative of the state would mean that she was a traitor. It is through such framing

¹⁰⁰ The other possibility is to revisit the condition that has made it normal to think that Ayelech’s body is always already commercial.

that the women of *wube bereha* and many female artists were obliged to make sacrifices for the state. Asnakech Worqu told me that members of the aristocracy and the royal family used to “call” actresses from backstage through a liaison. If the gaze and desire came from the higher authority, refusal would entail punishment. Many female artists remember what happened to them through male’s call called *tifelegiyalesh*.

Asnakech reminisced:

There was this thing called – *tifelegiyalesh* [you are called!] Someone would come after the show or during our rehearsals and say ‘you are called.’ The liaisons came from the palace not only to fetch film reels from the Haile Selassie I Theatre but also to take us to Haile Selassie’s palace. It was the young royal family members who used to do that. We were not in a position to refuse because we knew what would follow. What would make it even uglier was that the liaison would say, “I want to taste you.” We used to refuse, warning the liaisons that we would report to their lord. It was ugly.

A number of female actresses had experienced *tifelegiyalesh*. It was public knowledge that, for instance, Prince Mekonnen had an affair with Asegedeche Alamrew (“Ke’fikir Teleyche” 18). When a magazine asked her about an alleged relationship with this prince, Asnakech said that it was known that he and Asegedeche had an affair “like husband and wife.” In the same interview, Asnakech mentioned that, “some of the officials are people to whom one cannot say no” (Ibid). It was not only for the empire’s nobilities and other officials but also for foreign diplomats that the state sacrificed these women’s bodies.

Conclusion

Setting forth to deconstruct the military council's representations of space at the turn of the 1974 revolution, Chapter Three has shown how it is important to put such socialist rationalizations, including Tsegaye's idea of defilement into perspective through a genealogical probing. The *Derg*'s misrepresentation of the past as a regime that tolerated and even embraced "prostitutions/prostitutes" was premised on the invention of regime of naming and the ontological idea that sexualized female bodies were to be placed outside of the social space. For sexual workers were perceived and conceived as sinful (*zimut adariwoch*) and dangerous criminals (*lumpenproletariat*). The military council's urge to conduct research after research on what it called *zimut adarinet* or "prostitution" and to come up with new prescriptions hinged on its claim that it radically broke with Haile Selassie's regime.

Paradoxically enough, however, some of the military's surveys were re-citing from similar researches conducted during Haile Selassie's time-space. Those re-citations, as utterances of naming and allusions to previous scripts of power, expose not only the continuation of relations of domination and their governmental mechanisms but also the performativity of heteropatriarchal power. The so-called scientific researching, naming, and marking of sexualized and commodified bodies (which singled out the female body as the sole culprit of "prostitution") necessitated this chapter's quest to understand the birth of new epistemes, rationalizations, and practices around the female body in Ethiopia.

Hence, the chapter genealogically probed into relevant discourses in early twentieth-century Ethiopia. Attending to what the early twentieth-century Ethiopian intellectuals had to do about their conditions, the chapter lays bare the ways in which they conceived Ethiopia as a postcolonial state despite its un-colonized status in terms of political colonization. This, the chapter argued, would help us to push the boundary of the theoretical import of coloniality of power as it should also be understood as a complex condition that put pressure on an independent (uncolonized) state. That was why Gabre-Hiwot Baykedagn and Melaku Bayen surmised that Ethiopia could not claim that it was independent unless it overcame poverty and pain. That conviction informed the ways in which those intellectuals persuaded the state, using their proximity to leaders of Ethiopia, in particular, to the young “progressive” Teferi Mekonnen who was soon crowned as Haile Selassie I.

Since coloniality of power works also from the site of seduction, the chapter employed Tageldin’s idea of translational seduction to show how Ethiopian intellectuals took Europe as translatable as the latter also presented itself as such. Yet their detour around Europe to reach Japan, as well as their effort to emulate Japan by adopting Europe and using its modernization as a strategy of anti-colonial struggle, was fascinating in that it revealed the inequality concealed in global capitalism and cultural imperialism. The chapter furthered its discussion and analysis to show that one position of the early twentieth-century intellectuals was a position of untranslatability. It also shows, following Tageldin’s theory of translational seduction, how the actions within coloniality of power are not fixed either in the colonized/colonized binary or in the hybridity of the

two. By bringing the position of untranslatability, Chapter Three furthers the debate to show how the coloniality of power is a three dimensional dialectical space-time whose entry and exit points are multiple and chaotic.

In spite of the discourse invented by the military's socialist programs, the larger Marxist movements of the 1974 revolution, and Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin's Ethiopian socialism, the chapter debunks the birth of new knowledge/power, recasting it as a rationalization that in fact marked the sexualized and commodified female body as a function of the coloniality of power. After it exposes how sexualized and commodified women were discursively invented as "contaminated" and "contaminating" bodies, the chapter has shown the ways in which female performers and women of the red-light districts negotiated spaces mapped and controlled by the state. The geographical proximity and the shared modern sensibilities of the Municipality and Love of the Country theatres on the one hand and the *wube bereha* (Desert) red-light district on the other elucidate how the fixture of formal spaces as administrative and aesthetic body-politics of modernity was false and violent. The Municipality theatre could not realize its modern aesthetics – through, for instance, a social play that shows love affairs departing from the norms of patriotic and religious plays – without the coming to the stage of women of *wube bereha* like Asnakech Worku, whose roles used to be played by male actors through cross-dressing.

What is equally important is the way in which women of the red-light districts re-accented the meaning that state-owned theatres staged. While the city attempted to fix the sexualized and commodified females in the space of passion and in nocturnal time,

women resisted that by traversing social and cultural time-spaces. For instance, Asnakech Worku was obliged to straddle the theatre and her *kiosk* in the red-light district due to the minimal payment she received at the theatres. She embodied a character that resembled her own lived experience. That movement blurred the binary between imaginative character and real personal experience. She re-enacted herself. That re-enactment complicates and makes deeply murky the very idea of performance, in that part of Asnakech's life was where the dehumanizing sexual labor is invested. Like Ayelech, the character she played, Asnakech never took sexual work as work from which she wanted to earn money permanently but as an obligation imposed on her. Yet she felt empowered playing Ayelech because it was through performance that she and other women of the red-light districts acted in a political performative.

In their bodily presence at Haile Selassie I Theatre where women actors used traditional performance, a scripted play offered by a relatively self-reflexive playwright, women also in their roles as audience members co-performing with the actors – participated as co-creators by applauding (to) the female characters of a red-light district and wooing the male antagonists. They took the actions on the stage as a call and responded to them. In so doing, they became actors – co-creators – so much so that their actions changed the very form of the theatrical production.

On the whole, the chapter argued that the mis/representation of Haile Selassie's regime in the 1974 revolution was predicated upon the suppression of the global-local conditions that informed the birth of new modern logics around sanitization and order. The suppression of those new epistemic formations made it possible for the *Derg* in

general and for Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin (as we have seen in Chapters One and Two), in particular, to mark Haile Selassie's time-space as impure and project that notion of impurity on the body of women (artists). That suppression elided the historical material relations that coerced female performing bodies to behave and act in certain manner as much as the continuous tactical moves those bodies engender. These always bear on the ways in which space-time is perceived, conceived, and lived. Any articulation of freedom always falls short whenever it disavows such historical material dialectical relations. Hence, violence reproduces itself for the heteropatriarchal regime sustains its relations of productions.

CONCLUSION

What Is New in the New Beginning? Decolonial Co-Creations

Decolonial Embodied Historiography

Chapter One has mainly argued that a critique of traditional historiography, or a critical way of *thinking with* rather than *investigating* the past, needs to challenge the colonality of power in order for it to be productive. Aníbal Quijano outlines four areas of human existence: sex, labour, collective authority and inter/subjectivity. Then he tries to understand how their resources and products are organized to sustain relations of domination under raced global capitalism. On the axis of sex and gender, Quijano measures the colonality of power and the inter/subjectivity it produces in terms of “sexual access, and its resources, and products” (qtd in Lugones “Coloniality of Gender”).

María Lugones critiques Quijano’s formulation of the gender and sexuality question in his conception of the colonality of power. She converses with Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí to consolidate her critique. Oyěwùmí offers a perspective that debunks what she calls Westocentric “bio-logic” epistemology that imposes categories of gender and sexuality on non-Western particularly African subjectivities. She argues that this “biological” epistemology conceals and sustains its multifaceted hegemony, whose colonial violence obliterated other ways of knowing. She argues that African bodies cannot be lumped in categories such as men, women, and homosexual, showing how *anafemales* (the concept that she brings to go beyond Eurocentric categorization) were inferiorized by

colonialism. This helps Lugones to argue that Quijano does not just err but also imports Eurocentric assumptions of gender and sexuality in his conception of the colonality of power. In Lugones's view Quijano does not conceptualize gender as a construction unlike his discussion on race.

Chapter One has also drawn from other important theoretical possibilities in Oyěwùmí's rethinking of history as this directly bears on my discussion of decolonial embodied historiography. Oyěwùmí critiques traditional history writing first by going beyond textual-disciplinary-professional historiography and seeing history as lived experience, lived oral tradition, and a discipline and profession. In history writing, even consideration of oral sources works towards turning the oral lived experience into text by relegating them to the level of just sources: a logic that derives from its main preoccupation with the written archive. Nonetheless, Oyěwùmí highlights the lived experience in the everyday without a total disavowal of, but rather through a rethinking written history. To a certain degree, my work has tried to respond to Oyěwùmí's call. She says: "the concept of gender bias in history itself calls for a close examination in that it privileges the Euro-American [Westocentric] tradition of male-dominant history" (83).

However, thinking with Bibi Bakere-Yusuf, I have proposed a caveat in rethinking the colonality of gender and sexuality since Oyěwùmí's ahistorical conceptions of gender symmetry in pre-colonial Africa would allow a homogenization of time-space into decolonial embodied historiography. This takes me to discussion of Sylvia Wynter's historiographical sensibilities, which she builds in constant conversation with Franz Fanon. Wynter's idea of consciousness of the body, the invention of the

biocentric Man, the shift to the culturally programmed rather than the genetically inscribed relation, and the reconceptualization of being human as a praxis through insertion of oneself into a planetary existence are very important scenarios that inform my theoretical and methodological formulations in decolonial embodied historiography.

The intervention that decolonial embodied historiography wants to make is informed by efforts also to debunk a heteropatriarchal colonial modernity that regulates and manages subjectivities in view of the universal Man. This debunking necessitates the deconstruction of the biocentric logic and invention of Man as the model of being human. Such an understanding, in turn, calls for creation of decolonial options at an epistemological and praxis level without taking the two as separate realms but rather understanding these as dialectically related embodied acts. My critique of Ethiopian traditional historiography results from such decolonial sensibilities. I have taken the notion of the *burden of history* as an object of analysis to rethink the epistemology that riddles positivist history writing in Ethiopia. I have also shown how the deployment of the trope, ‘burden of history,’ rationalizes an ethnic-developmental political and economic program. These are dialectically related issues. A colonial theory and methodology of traditional historiography inform, for instance, the ways in which female performing bodies are used and abused by the state and how they engender insurgency.

Hence, deconstruction of a Hegelian colonial theory and methodology of history writing, rationalizations that deploy historicist epistemology to naturalize political and economic programs, and the self-insertion of the female body into history or recreation of oneself in the social space have become important points of discussion in this chapter.

Then I asked: What other realities have been glossed over due to the metanarrative of Ethiopian exceptionalism? What other questions should we ask to go beyond the uniqueness narrative without discarding the significance of resistance embedded in the exceptionalism discourse? More important, I queried: How did Ethiopian historiography account for the disavowal of any discussion about its theoretical and methodological imports that, however, lurk beneath history writing?

Chapter One also argued that the question of temporality and spatiality is quintessential in decolonial embodied historiography because Hegelian theory and methods of history are always already riddled with spatiotemporal questions. For Hegel reduces not only space into time but also space into place. In his view, the difference between Europe and Africa is not one of just a time lag. Africans are locked in the Torrid Zone. For the African body that Hegel fixed in the un-European (un-historical) time and in the Torrid Zone, the progress towards the Universal Man is always an im/possibility. The moment of possibility can only be realized in the realm of temporality. Yet for that progress in time to happen, Hegel entails, the white man should always intervene in Africans' lives. They have to be colonized for them to get into Europe's trail of time.

Since Wynter's reminder about the march towards the universal human, Man, is instructive, I read a Hegelian conception of time and place/space in the neoliberal present. Africans have to be on the global market whose theory and practice the Man has created. They have to be structurally adjusted and readjusted through institutions like IMF. They have to open up to and let the West penetrate them in time and space so that they can 'develop.' In terms of space, Hegel posits, the African body is not just always

already but also forever and ever entangled with its climate, geography, swamps, jungles, deserts and mountains. These sensibilities still circulate even in the apparently sympathetic designers of Millennium Development Goals at the United Nations. For instance, “friends” of Ethiopia like Jeffrey Sachs, who closely worked with late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in the realization of the so-called Millennium Development Goals, writes that “geography has conspired with economics to give Africa a particularly weak hand” and the “combination of Africa’s adverse geography and its extreme poverty creates the worst poverty trap in the world” (208). Without addressing the onslaughts that global colonial modernity waged against the non-Man, an attempt to explain such a “poverty trap” in terms of geographic “adverse” effects shows the prevalence of what Wynter calls a “model of the human” as the white Man. In terms of spatial relations, a Hegelian conception of history also informs how colonial/modern spatialization works. Progress unfolds not just on the axis of unilinear temporality but also in the penetrations of Man’s space into the ‘immovable’ ‘place’ of the Other.

Complicated by the “seductions of translations,” in Tageldin’s conception, non-Western subjectivities also interiorize Man’s space to import Western-centric modernity to their homelands as Man comes with his time and space into theirs. Understanding the workings of the Eurocentric episteme and practice as a temporal and spatial *progress* or *development* towards Man’s World, Chapter One deconstructed the Hegelian Universal Spirit by questioning the trope of the *burden of history* in Ethiopian historiography. It shifted the focus away from discussions of homogenized temporality or the long pedigree of history writing as a discipline and profession with all its imports of colonial theory and

methodology. In doing that, the chapter unveils the historicist project of history writing that disclaims apriority to shatter any philosophical discussion while it employs a Rankean and Hegelian theory and methodology. The chapter thus relocates the *burden* in the site of history writing than in an empty time-place. It lays bare the positivist theory and methodology embedded in traditional history (discipline and profession) by taking performance as a mode of thinking to attend to the thinking moving body in dialectical space-time.

With a decolonial move, the chapter further showed how the TPLF/EPRDF's discourse of ethnicity cannibalized the soliloquy of Shakespeare's Hamlet, whose words - "to be or not to be" – signify confusion rather than a choice between two distinct categories of badness and goodness. While Hamlet shuttles in the tense space of "to be or not to be," EPRDF's historian (who was based in Addis Ababa University's History Department) twisted Shakespeare's words to manufacture a Manichean politics between two extreme ends of goodness and badness. Deploying positivist historiography in the service of politics, this discourse marked two 'bigger' ethnic groups in Ethiopia as embodiments of bad politics, while it accorded goodness to TPLF/EPRDF. The binary created the condition for TPLF/EPRDF to pit peoples ('Amharas' and 'Oromos') against one another. It also made it easy and necessary for the state to let people live and die. Its consequence impacted the ways in which oppositions frame their struggle and cast a shadow over articulations of freedom in the present. Ethnicity and the veiled issue of race have forced many to espouse hatred and violence. Identity politics has relegated

intersectional questions of gender, sexuality, class, capital, and other issues unthinkable. When economic issues are raised they usually tend to be tainted with identity politics.

The second object of analysis that I used is an attempt to show how a project of ethno/nationalism disavows the very body it ab/uses. While it uses her body to stage its discourse of “nations, nationalities, and peoples” on the one hand and its “developmental” projects on the other, the state has always exploited and marginalized the female performing body. The last part of Chapter One analyzed a ‘dialectical image in an ethnic-dance’ presented at the 60th anniversary of the National Theatre. In order to further its argument and analyze the dialectical image of dancing bodies, this section of the chapter has drawn from Pedro Rocha de Oliveira’s idea of aestheticization of reality. Oliveira argues that ideology collapses “reality and experience into one another” in order to conceal “experiencing” (273).

The last discussion of this chapter then exposed the modality in which the state sponsored choreography of “ethnic” performance has hidden the violence of identity politics and socialist-cum-neoliberal economic exploitation. It showed how performance and performativity were at the heart of obfuscations of realities. The state used its employees/ artists to stage its ethnic performances. Government officials cited from and enacted the state’s script of “growth and transformation plan.” The state monopolized the theatres and obliged the performers to participate in its aestheticization of reality.

The performance of ethnic music and dance from Konso and Derashe ethnic groups offered a possibility to hold a dialectical image that is surrounded by

constellations. In the state's so-called multiculturalist yet neoliberal cultural programs, which integrated culture and tourism in profit-making schemes, the Konso-Derashe song and dance was one among many staged to reify its politics of ethnicity. However a senior female performer re-choreographed the dance, inserting her body into it though she was not originally included in that specific production. She also made it more dramatic, accentuating the gendered aspect of her body when she passed a necklace from the Konso-Derashe culture to a younger performer as a baton. Following Walter Benjamin's idea of "dialectics at a standstill," I have used this image of passing a necklace as a baton to show how the embodied presence of a female performing body interrupted the official narration of history as progress and cultural transmission in empty time.

However, the dialectical nature of such images revealed another layer of contradiction in which this seemingly peaceful transmission was punctured by a confrontation between the very female bodies who enacted the performance of passing and receiving a baton. Making use of their bodies for its politics of ethnicity and development, the state has glossed over histories of women's struggles. That is one reason why their struggles are fragmented so much so that different generations of female performing bodies confront each other instead of building on one another's struggles and wielding critical alliances. These developments clearly show that it is imperative to think with the past to understand what other questions were there in the 1974 revolution, which are mis/represented in the present as just a time of heightened consciousness of ethnicity.

Staging Ethiopian Socialism: In Between Paradoxes and Inequalities

Chapter Two comprises two parts that are dialectically related. The first part discusses the often forgotten but decisive staging of “Ethiopian socialism” in relation to the ideology of “scientific socialism.” Student movements of the 1970s have been overrepresented as the main space for articulation of ideas. However, theatre and performance as sites of ideological and political struggles have been disavowed. In the second chapter, my discussion of the performance of “Ethiopian socialism” divulges silenced and erased histories of the female performing bodies.

In this regard the opening of Chapter Two served as a performative scenario in which two letters are used to present the confrontation between Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin and Telela Kebede. Instead of the altercation between “Ethiopian socialism” and “scientific socialism,” it is this confrontation between artists Telela and Tsegaye that dictates the structure of the chapter, the arguments, and analysis. The first part of Chapter Two discussed how and why Tsegaye’s conception of “Ethiopian socialism” emerged in the 1974 revolution and how the staging of that ideology bore on female performing bodies. The second part of the chapter, in turn, dealt with the tactics that female performers used to negotiate and resist Tsegaye’s disciplinary measures, which marked their bodies as impure, as they fought for their rights on many fronts and in many spaces.

In the first section the confrontation unfolded between the competing efforts of “Ethiopian socialism/s” and “scientific socialism” to effect change in the trajectory of the 1974 revolution. Tsegaye staged his version of “Ethiopian socialism” as a critique of the bourgeois elites of Haile Selassie’s empire as well as the leaders of the Ethiopian student

movements, particularly those who were moving from North America and Europe to Ethiopia in the wake of the revolution. Because the literatures on the 1974 revolution dwell on “The Ethiopian Student Movement,” other articulations of freedom and struggles have not been worthy of attention.

The major differences between Tsegaye’s Ethiopian socialism and the student movements’ scientific socialism were the following: While Tsegaye argued against any vanguardism, taking the people/masses as conscious beings who understood their condition through lived experience, “scientific socialists” put the proletariat at the forefront considering the peasantry, petite bourgeoisie, and the intelligentsia as forces in the national revolutionary democracy that would rally behind the worker. Tsegaye also critiqued the position of ‘certainty’ in Eurocentric science and reasoning, arguing that the human world is uncertain and that Europe’s reason died when it turned its reasoning to legitimate the genocide it perpetrated on Jews, Russians, and colonized people. On the other hand, the “scientific socialists” argued for social science and objective methodology to find universal truth, which they believed should take the Marxian dialectical stage-by-stage progress of modes of production. Even though both parties had similar readings of the status of ethnic and religious domination in Ethiopia, Tsegaye stressed the question of race, the blackness of Ethiopians, and a generative humanism embedded in religions (acknowledging their co-optation by empires) in order to critique the Semitic thesis. He also suggested unity through appraisal of the positive sides of the past and re-organization of Ethiopia’s space towards Pan-African alliance. On the contrary, “scientific socialists” articulated the ethnicity/national question in Stalinist and Leninist

terms foregrounding self-determination, including secession. Whereas Tsegaye brought issues of gender and sexuality by staging his ideology rather than in his theoretical essays, the “scientific socialists” articulated gender in classical Marxist-Leninist terms in that they made the question subordinate to the class/capital and ethnicity questions.

Suggesting that these articulations of socialism informed the ways in which issues of gender and sexuality did not get the attention they deserved, the first part of Chapter Two moved on to the discussion of Tsegaye’s version of *negritude* to focus more on his conception of the National Theatre and his staging of an Ethiopian socialism. Tsegaye’s articulation of humanism that drew from Léopold Sédar Senghor’s *negritude* had also a direct bearing on his perception of Haile Selassie’s regime, on his conception of the female performing body in the 1970s, and on the lived experiences of women artists who worked with him.

In his theory of being human, Senghor does not just turn the Cartesian binary – particularly its artificial dichotomy between mind and body – on its head when he relocates mind in the body. He also tears the Cartesian binary between mind/body apart to see in between what Michael Echeruo calls the “seriality” of one and another. Senghor takes the dancing, moving body seriously to go beyond Eurocentric objective distance and preoccupation with sight and to embrace the “reason of touch.” That opens up possibilities to take the moving body as a mode of thinking and as a thinking being. In so doing, Senghor offers to ALL a new humanism.

Tsegaye's conception of the human is highly influenced by this thinking, as is evident in his use of similar terms and conceptions. Yet his theorization uses language rather than a dancing body. For him, language is an embodied experience. In his thinking, language is a worldview that could start from an individual's experience in a social space. However, that window/worldview should widen its horizon to embrace all humanity. Tsegaye's wider worldview breaks any bondage in a single and superior language. His language/body embraces humanity, nature, and cosmos.

Tsegaye employed this worldview in his essays, poetry, and plays mainly to critique the Semitic thesis that gave a superior position to the elites of the Solomonic dynasty, particularly Haile Selassie's regime and the Eurocentric Marxists of the 1970s. He argued that Ethiopians should stop marginalizing their fellow people with darker skin color and instead embraces their blackness. For scientific research (archeological studies) revealed that all original inhabitants of the region were blacks before they mingled through time. Since hybridity is the hallmark of black people, Tsegaye argues, it should not erase the basic blackness of Ethiopians. With that premise, Tsegaye attacked both the Semitic thesis and the ethnonationalist Marxists who proposed secession as a solution. Tsegaye put emphasis on the ways in which Haile Selassie's regime pushed societies to the edge until they hated themselves. He also emphasized the fact that Haile Selassie's rule denied its blackness and the manner in which it used ethnic differences and its ideology of superiority to divide and govern the people of Ethiopia.

In Tsegaye's terms, Haile Selassie's regime "defiled" the people, the performers in general and the female actors in particular. He projected the characterization he gave to

the *ancien régime* onto the bodies of the people, artists, and the female performers who used to own bars in the red-light districts of Addis Ababa. The particular emphasis Tsegaye attached to the bodies of female performers informed his whole project of the National Theatre as an idea and as a place. Once he marked the female performers as impure bodies who interrupted and contaminated his Ethiopian socialist stage and Pan-African artistic mission, Tsegaye mobilized resources to fight them at the Ministry of Culture, the National Theatre (the new name he gave to the former Haile Selassie I Theatre), Love of the Country Theatre, Yared Music School, Addis Ababa Art School, and other cultural centers in the capital and in the provinces.

Ethiopian Socialism: Inadequacies, Paradoxes, and Female Performers' Resistance

In the second part, the chapter focused on the female performing bodies at the National Theatre and showed how they participated in the revolutionary struggle before Tsegaye came to the theatre. It explored the embodied creative resistance of female artists who created the conditions for a male revolutionary artist and thinker (Tsegaye) to come back and stage his ideology of Ethiopian socialism. Tsegaye's theorization and staging of Ethiopian socialism played out on the lived experience of female performing bodies in many ways. It also informed the kind of resistance the female performers enacted. However, it did not stop them from moving in spaces that countered its representation of their bodies as impure, scandalous, and victimized or docile.

Tsegaye's critical sensibilities around questions of language, embodied experience, the redefinition of subjectivity in terms of self-another seriality, and the rethinking of Ethiopia in racial, ethnic, religious, class, capital, and gender terms also

offered a possibility to the performers. The way in which he adapted and staged Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* under the title *Enat Alem Tenu* is a case in point. His conception of spatiotemporal relations as fragmentary and open-ended allowed him to bring to the stage a deceased body of a person and an old man who is released from prison. And he described the present moment as a time of "victory and death." In doing so, he unsettled the *status quo* – both the dying system of Haile Selassie and the emerging military rule. To take another example, Tsegaye's character in his play *ABC*, who goes by the name Gene, is a professional wailer who also personifies a national sexual labour manipulated by a male profiteer. However, paradoxes also mark Tsegaye's conception of and actions against the female performers, whom he labeled as impure bodies that defiled and interrupted his socialist progress.

In order to see the political in the creative dramaturgy that female performers choreographed with their male colleagues to oppose such reductions of their bodies to "impurity" and to change their position in the society, the second part of Chapter Two began its discussion by presenting their resistance history since the beginning of the revolution in February 1974. As soon as the revolution erupted, the actors at the Haile Selassie I Theatre (which had been called so until Tsegaye came) seized the moment of "*yiwredulin*" ("demands of dismissal"), to borrow Telela's words. Their actions were directed towards ousting the director of the Haile Selassie I and Love of the Country theatres.

The second part of this chapter, then, elucidated how the actors rethought and enacted a poetic dramaturgy collectively, in a dialectical act of reading, analyzing, script

writing, and oral performance/embodied actions. From the bigger dramaturgy of the female actors' imaginative resistance, we can discern the following: staging protest as a get-together party; using personal connections with journalists to launch a public debate about performance-sexual work; meeting with higher officials to bring about change; participation in revolutionary plays; writing back to power through letters; the April street demonstration.

Tapping into the available means they had at their disposal, the female performers used their connections and friendship with journalists to make the problem they faced at the Haile Selassie I and Love of the Country theatres a public debate. Atnafu Mekonnen and his administration, which oversaw both theatres, accused the female actresses of disgracing the theatres and the arts, for most of the female actors used to work at various nightclubs. When the administration warned that it would dismiss the women once and for all, the journalists commented that if the theatres were to take that kind of decision it would only be pushing the actresses into the nightclub business forever.

Even as they unsettled their administration publicly through media, the women continued to organize a party as a protest. The dramaturgy of the creative protest included most employees from ushers to cleaners and secretaries, from stage technicians to actors, writers and directors. Unlike the traditional dramaturgy that gave much credence to text, scriptwriters and their advisor/s, the artists went beyond to enact a multi-genre political performance that challenged the status quo. The performers made co-creation their new methodology of space making and production of subjectivity. They staged a get-together party and creatively ousted the director, Atnafu Mekonnen. Then the artists appealed

tactically to Prime Minister Endalkachew (by waiting for him in front of his residency) to appoint Ahadu Sabure as Minister of Ministry of Information. Then they presented their fundamental demands to the Information Minister including the appointment of Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin as their new director.

Even if they respected and enjoyed Tsegaye's art works in which they participated among fellow revolutionaries, the performers' alliance with Tsegaye was short-lived. The female performers continued to participate in his plays while they resisted his ban on their nightclub businesses. The women sought the support of male colleagues to maneuver the rhetoric of the masculinist and socialist space and write back to Tsegaye, re-using his own terms and the rhetoric of socialist Ethiopia but to a different end. The resources that Tsegaye accumulated in order to stage Ethiopian socialism gave him leverage to quell the resistance. He dismissed Telela while he made sure that everyone closed her nightclub.

The street protest that took place on April 22, 1976, signifies complex spatiotemporal relations that shed light on the importance of the day. All the performers gained permanent positions at the National and Love of the Country theatres. They were acknowledged as civil servants. Before the state had denied them the right to be permanent members of civil service or to form their own professional union. It also relegated them to the space of the *azmari* caste group. To become a worker was to be considered as a proletariat. Hence, the victory that the performers won was not just that of becoming a worker but also that of changing subjectivity, since the English term 'artist' in the Ethiopian theatre has come to be a title which denotes a respected status, by

contrast to the pejorative connotations of *azmarinet* or minstrelsy (even though there are people who still pride themselves on being called *azmari*). However, the fight continued even after Tsegaye was fired from the National Theatre, since the Derg was measuring who is who after it witnessed the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party's involvement in the April demonstration that the artists staged.

The April 22 protest is also instructive to understand the fictionalization of the past in the present. The chapter has already shown that most of the literature written about the student movements of the 1974 revolution cast the movement as independent and monolithic. Yet within the National Theatre various groups in fact had varying goals, though what brought them together was their protest against Tsegaye's administration and their protracted demands. For instance, within the ranks of the artists there were both EPRP sympathizers and Meison party members. The fact that EPRP members from outside of the theatre joined the protest as all participants marched toward the 4 Kilo Palace, attested to the homologies between as well as the contradictions of different spaces.

After the crackdown, EPRP used the protest to exaggerate the state violence to stage a coup in July 1976 and to launch urban shooting in the subsequent months. The crux of the matter is that while questions of gender, sexuality, class, caste, ethnicity, self-determination, Eritrean independence, and others came together in one protest like the April 22 event, TPLF/EPRDF homogenized the murky time-space of the 1974 revolution as only a time in which the issue of "ethnicity surged forth." It called the movements definitively as "The Ethiopian Student Movement," as many from the movements do.

Then it invented a binary between the ethnicity/class issues. Through such valorization of the object, other questions than ethnicity have been relegated to oblivion. The issues of gender and sexuality have been delayed, denied, and coopted. The constant marginalization of the sexualized and commodified body has had a long and complicated fragmentary history, which demands understanding the emergence of the female dangerous liaison in Ethiopia and the attendant management of her life and death.

Accumulated Injuries, Unending Moves: Emergence of the ‘Dangerous Liaison’

Setting forth to deconstruct the military council’s representations of space in the turn of the 1974 revolution, Chapter Three has shown how it is important to put socialist rationalizations, including Tsegaye’s idea of defilement into perspective through a genealogical probing. The so-called scientific researching, naming, and marking of sexualized and commodified bodies (which singled out the female body as the sole culprit of “prostitution”) necessitated the chapter’s quest to understand the birth of new epistemes, rationalizations, and practices around the female body in Ethiopia.

The chapter debunks the birth of new knowledge/power that rationalized the state’s project of marking and segregating the sexualized and commodified female body. It showed how intellectuals of early twentieth century Ethiopia conceived their condition as a postcolonial experience even though Ethiopia was not politically colonized. While the exceptionalism narrative that we see today does not deal with Eurocentric colonial models that still create problems, previous generations of Ethiopians long grappled with issues of coloniality of power and colonialism. Indeed, closer study also revealed that early-twentieth-century Ethiopian intellectuals and theatre practitioners were not just

warding off a looming colonialism but understood their condition as one affected by the coloniality of power.

Seductions and negotiations of power inform the complex conditions that put pressure on an independent (uncolonized) state. The chapter has shown, following Tageldin's theory of translational seduction, how actions within the coloniality of power are not fixed either in the colonizer/colonized binary or in the hybridity of the two. This particular chapter has also brought a position of untranslatability into the discussion. The chapter then furthered the discussion to show how coloniality of power is a three-dimensional dialectical relation whose entry and exit points are multiple and chaotic.

Yet the main focus of the subsequent parts of Chapter Three attempted to understand how the negotiation of the coloniality of power re-inscribed colonial logics and mechanisms of managing life and death. This question revealed the birth of the sexualized and commodified female body as the dangerous liaison. It also unveiled how such a shift in epistemology and constant negotiations with modernity put pressure on what some intellectuals, theatre practitioners, and the state invented as the contaminated and contaminating body. It uncovered the epistemological rationalizations that animated the state's acts of sanitizing, mapping, researching, naming, and segregating sexed and gendered bodies, particularly female performing bodies.

However, the chapter also showed how the state's project of marking and segregating sexualized and commodified female bodies is always troubled. Specifically, the historical material relations and the geographical proximity between the Municipality and Love of the Country theatres on the one hand and the *wube bereha* (Desert) red-light

district on the other elucidated how the fixture of formal spaces as administrative and aesthetic body-politics of modernity was false and violent. Women of the red-light districts used the fissures in official discourses and practices to walk in between these fissures and make their lives meaningful with mindful moves.

The chapter has closely followed how some sexual workers from *wube bereha* red-light district frequented the state owned theatres, critiquing, and in some instances re-accenting the meaning that playwrights and performers staged. While the city attempted to fix the sexualized and commodified females in the space of passion and in nocturnal time, women of *wube bereha* and other red-light districts resisted that by traversing the everyday social and cultural time-spaces. Specifically, when an empathetic play was staged at the Haile Selassie I Theatre in the 1960s, these women took the actions on the stage as a call and responded to them. In so doing, they became actors – co-creators of meaning – so much so that their actions changed the very form of the theatrical production.

Furthermore, the state-owned theatres recruited actresses from the red-light districts and nightclubs on many occasions. Some have become successful performers. Actresses like Asnakech Worku who came from nightclubs have demonstrated their extraordinary talent and skill, imprinting their names in the history of Ethiopian theatre. Of course, apart from any valorization of their journey, a closer critical look at the lived experiences of female performers demands constant deconstruction of the workings of heteropatriarchal infrastructures. For instance, Asnakech was obliged to straddle the theatre and her *kiosk* in the red-light district due to the minimal payment she received at

the theatres. In some cases, her role-playing at the theatres and her lived experience seem to cross each other. In *Living with a Cougar*, Asnakech embodied a character that resembled her own lived experience. That movement blurred the binary between imaginative character and real personal experience. Her lived experience defied the categories of 're-enactment' as well as re-living. That is why Ayako Kano warns us to be mindful that gendered and sexed bodies and the complex space they inhabit cannot be equated with performance. Asnakech's embodiment of Ayelech (a character in *Living with a Cougar*) complicates the idea of performance to make it so murky that the same body role-plays while she carries the real-life pain of sexual labor. Like Ayelech (the character), Asnakech never took sexual work as work from which she wanted to earn money permanently but as an obligation imposed on her. Yet she felt empowered playing Ayelech because it was through performance that she and other women of the red-light districts acted in a rare political performative. It was rare because since the 1940s, the representations of the sexual worker always mark and remark her body as scandalous to the point that such representations became so banal.

The mis/representation of Haile Selassie's regime in the 1974 revolution was predicated upon the suppression of the abovementioned global-local conditions. The birth of the idea and practice of sanitization and order usually singled out and criminalized sexualized and commodified female bodies, intensifying and reproducing their conditions. The suppression of those new epistemic formations and the multifaceted histories of female bodies made it possible for the *Derg*, other Marxist politicians, and Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin (as we have seen in Chapter One and Two), to mark Haile

Selassie's time-space as impure and to extend that notion of impurity to mark the body of sexualized women in general and female artists in particular. That marking elided the historical material relations that coerced female performing bodies to behave and act in a certain manner as well as the kind of tactical insurgency they enacted to resist those imposed conditions. These always bear on the ways in which space-time is perceived, conceived, and lived. Any articulation of freedom always falls short whenever it disavows such historical material dialectical relations. Hence, violence reproduces itself for the heteropatriarchal regime sustains its relations of production.

Break the Wall, Build the Bridge: What is New in the New Beginning?

On July 30, 2018, thousands of Ethiopians who live in Minnesota flocked to downtown Minneapolis. They headed to 600 North 1st Avenue, that is, to the fancy multipurpose arena, Target Center. Mostly bogged down in the day-to-day and long hours of work as minimum wage laborers, many Ethiopians do not frequent those kinds of spaces in the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis. As for the social bonds they have built among themselves, Ethiopians – mostly divided by ethnicity and religion – spend their leisure time at public spaces they have created around their respective communities. A few who work for corporates might go out and see an NBA game or a music concert at Target Center. The reason why most Ethiopians flooded Target Center on July 30, however, was due to an event that most Ethiopians who live in Minnesota, including myself, did not want to miss – albeit for different reasons. The new Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed (PhD) and his delegation would be arriving in Minneapolis next to their visits to Washington D.C. and Los Angeles. The banner of the Prime Minister's

North American tour was “break the wall, build the bridge.” It set out to end the long altercation between TPLF/EPRDF and the politically influential Ethiopian diaspora, which in itself, however, is highly divided.

The organizers of this event, some members of the Oromo community in the Twin Cities with marginal participation of other communities, knew that it was only such a bigger space – whose capacity is more than 20,000 people – that would accommodate their guests. It is estimated that 40,000 Ethiopians live in Minnesota, with a larger presence of Oromo and Somali-speaking people. The people who gathered at the Target Center were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the new Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed (PhD) and the rest of the delegation.

Ethiopians who live in their country and in the diaspora seem to be possessed with what *The Economist* calls “Abiymania” (“Going Wild”). Many consider the new Prime Minister as the embodiment of a dawn of hope in the Ethiopian present time-space one who comes with a different language of democracy and political leadership, speaking different languages such as Oromo, Amharic, and Tigrigna. In the eyes of many Ethiopians, the coming to power of Abiy Ahmed in April 2018 was set to dismantle the “To Be or Not to Be” manichean politics in Ethiopia.

Yet, I argue, given that the infrastructure that identity politics has built in Ethiopia has not been fought at the epistemic front, it will linger – since its undoing is also informed by what has been done to bodies in denying and valorizing ethnic identity. Given that the TPLF/EPRDF coalition has created a strong economic structure of belonging which does not wither away but persists under various guises, the present

moment is a tense time-space wherein despair and hope contrapuntally confront each other, creating euphoria along with and in relation to mass displacement, continuous killings, designed assassinations, un/designed privatizations, and new flirtations with the West, particularly with the United States. I ask then: What is new in the new beginning?

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was sworn into office on April 2, 2018, when the former Prime Minister, Haile Mariam Desalegn of EPRDF (who held the office when Meles Zenawi died in August 2012), resigned amid storms of protests. Unprepared for serious changes which Ethiopians were fighting for, Haile Mariam's government could not bring solutions, neither through the state of emergency it declared in October 2016 nor through its lifting in August 2017 and reinstatement in February 2018. Since TPLF/EPRDF came to power in 1991, thousands have been arrested, killed, and tortured, languishing in hidden and known chambers, like *Maekelawi* (The Center). However, the attacks on the bodies of those thousands pushed the people of Ethiopia to the point that many now defy death itself by confronting the callous federal police and the military bare-handed.

Abiy was elected in the middle of such crisis, not in an open general election but from within EPRDF. He is a member of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), which is part of the coalition that includes the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Amhara People's Democratic Movement (ANDM), and Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM). Although it was a power transfer within EPRDF that brought Abiy to power, it should be noted that there was a fierce fight within the coalition parties in which ANDM-OPDO forged an alliance while the TPLF-

SEPDM front posed a serious challenge to the former. Nevertheless, such alliances have never been such a dichotomized duality but chaotic relations in which double agents work for more than one party while oligarchs who are out of office still manipulate the workings of the parties to their ends.

It is vital to know what procedure EPRDF follows to understand how some members of the coalition parties capitalized on the peoples' protests and challenged TPLF's hegemony. According to the practice in EPRDF, for an individual member to become a Prime Minister, she or he has to be the chairperson of EPRDF. For that person to be elected as the chairperson of the coalition parties, s/he has to be a Parliament Member and chairperson of her/his respective party. Abiy was not the chairperson of his party OPDO but a Parliament Member. Lema Megersa, president of the Oromia regional state who has earned more popularity in his firm fight against TPLF, is not a member of the parliament though he was the chair of OPDO. Forging a tactic, OPDO called an urgent meeting and gave the chairmanship to Abiy. Yet the TPLF-SEPDM did not support him. ANDM's candidate withdrew amidst this development. That was actually another tactical move enacted by the ANDM-OPDO alliance. As a result, Abiy was elected as the Chairman of EPRDF getting 108 votes while the candidates of SEPDM and TPLF received 58 and 2 votes respectively. Interestingly enough, Abiy gained 18 more votes than the OPDO-ANDM voters could give him. Whichever party and individuals they came from, those votes offer an occasion to see the murkiness of political alliances and guileful moves from within.

In his acceptance speech, parting ways with the trend in EPRDF where personal stories were considered taboos to be shared in public, Abiy imparted his personal stories about his mother's investment in his life bringing also some issues of gender inequalities in Ethiopia. He bowed down in front of the parliamentarians, showing a sign of extreme humility when he received the leadership from Haile Mariam Desalegn. In the swearing-in ceremony, he took full responsibility on behalf of EPRDF for all the atrocities and agonies Ethiopians suffered from. He lamented the death of young people who were killed while they sought for change. He also reached out to various groups labeled as terrorists, political parties, and human rights defenders. On another occasion, when he was asked in the parliament why he released 'terrorists,' he replied that the Ethiopian state itself was a terrorist and they had to thank the people for giving it another chance. He also travelled to Eritrea to end an eighteen-year-old tension between the two countries that shadowed lives in the border areas and in the region at large since the end of the Ethio-Eritrea war in 2000. Abiy argued that there was not a situation called 'no war, no peace,' as many have continued to be tormented for so long because Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers have lived in the trenches along the disputed borders. He declared his determination to "demolish" walls and barriers inside and outside of Ethiopia. Following his domestic visits, Abiy toured in Eritrea, the Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Egypt and other countries.

The Ethiopian diaspora seemed his last stage, where he would break the wall that shattered communication not only between his government and the Ethiopian diaspora but also within and across various communities in diaspora. His North America visit

brought him to Washington D.C., Los Angeles, and Minneapolis where large numbers of Ethiopian immigrants live. As a matter of fact, politically speaking, the axes of his tour were just two: Washington/Los Angeles and Minnesota. The Washington-Los Angeles axis (representing mainstream activism and media) broadly signifies the Pan-Ethiopian discourse in which the concepts of unity, greater Ethiopia, and an untrammelled history of three thousand years of existence have had prominence. On the other hand, the Minnesota axis has been considered as the bastion of Oromo resistance and discourse of ethno/nationalism for about four decades.¹⁰¹

Whereas both are against the TPLF/EPRDF regime, at least as far as we know through the beginning of April 2018, activists in Minnesota and in Washington have been confronting each other. Their attempts at alliances did not mostly bear fruit. The ethnonationalists accuse the Pan-Ethiopianists of flattening out ethnic difference, while the latter criticize the Oromo ethnonationalists for being esoteric and vengeful. Both have their own ways of investigating the past being extensions of and tributaries to the historicist colonial historiography that my dissertation has discussed. Hence, Abiy's travel to the United States to "break the wall" was multifaceted. However, the notion of the wall has mainly been articulated in terms of Pan-Ethiopian and ethnic-centered nationalisms due to the existing pervasive discourse of identity politics and the consequences it produces. The pervasiveness of these discourses violently pushes other articulations of identity – let alone critical inter/intra/trans-sectional issues of gender, sexuality, class, capital, disability, and others – to the side.

¹⁰¹ This representation of Minnesota as Little Oromia is also a work of discourse, as there are many diverse communities from Ethiopia in Minnesota.

Hugging as a Hammer: Performance of Reconciliation

Performative re-citations and performance as an aesthetic form have continued to inform relationships including moments of reconciliation – acts of breaking the wall in the present. Songs that highlight the greater Ethiopian nationalism and that celebrate different ethnic groups were at the center of the Washington-LA-Minneapolis “Break the Wall, Build the Bridge” project. This discourse does not have a problem with diverse ethnic identities so far as they are articulated by putting Ethiopian-ness first. The performances of vivacious poetry recitals were imbued with nationalism that posited Ethiopia as a mysterious being and possessive spirit. Prime Minister Abiy, who recently disclosed himself as the writer of a film script, which came out under someone else’s name, already conceived his tour as a performance. He used an enactment of *hugging* as a sign of “putting the hammer on the wall” that divided the Ethiopian state and the diaspora.

In Washington D.C. at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, Abiy Ahmed invited to the stage Tamagn Beyene, the former comedian of the Ethiopian National Theatre who has challenged the Ethiopian state for so long as an activist. Tamagn’s activism is mostly informed by the Pan-Ethiopian sensibility that gives primacy to certain procedures of ‘unity.’ Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed invited Tamagn to demolish the *wall* by *hugging* him in front of thousands of audience members who have long revered Tamagn for so long and just fall in love with Abiy Ahmed recently. Accompanied by the cheering audience, roaring shouts, and ululations, Abiy moved towards Tamagn as he entered to the stage from the left wing. As they approached one

another, Tamagn almost knelt down and Abiy bowed. They lifted one another's shoulders with tender care and passion. They hugged each other for fourteen seconds. People hailed the acts. The performers embodied the act of breaking the wall. Two male bodies represented their respective constituencies and acted together to heal the divided "nation."

In Minnesota, various songs of different ethnic groups – but mainly Oromo language melodies – were played while the people were waiting for Prime Minister Abiy, Lemma Megersa (president of Oromia regional state), and other officials. When the higher state officials arrived on stage, the enthusiastic audiences shouted and welcomed them with ululations and whistling. Members of the Young Oromo Association performed their well-rehearsed and well-choreographed Oromo dances. A group that called itself the Young Ethiopian Dancers – all of them were girls – followed and performed traditional dances of four ethnic groups. Yet, before they presented their dances of other ethnic groups, one Master of the Ceremony interrupted them and told them to leave the stage for the next group. The Afar ethnic group female dancers also gave one performance. Yet, the interruption of the young Ethiopian dancers caused disapproval from some audience members who were complaining that Amhara culture was cut off. When one of the emcees came to the stage and invited any Amhara dance group present to perform, none went to the stage because their discontent came from the interruption of the Ethiopian Young Dancers Group which was about to give an Amhara culture performance too. Observing these tensions, Prime Minister Abiy made the following remark:

First these youth have done an amazing artwork to demolish the wall.

Because they forgot to stage the Amhara regional state's culture, I want to apologize on behalf of them. On behalf of them, I would like to say sorry with great humility. We would better be cautious not to erase what they have done in its entirety because they forgot to present a performance.

Let's add ourselves into one another's lives [he calls his model of inclusivity 'addition' giving it a meaning of crossing a boundary, though it has not been articulated in detail] and let's say thank you to them. When the wall gets demolished, the first hammer would not break it all in all at once. Trust me. Next year, they will perform best Gonder, best Shewa. My Amhara compatriots, let me remind you one thing. Know the fact that Oromo young people are absolutely thoughtful and the fact that they love you.

The Prime Minister thought that the audience's irritation was a reaction to the dance groups for not including Amhara cultural dances. However, it was the interruption by a Master of the Ceremony that created displeasure. And that did not escape the notice of the Prime Minister and his delegations. In fact, the disgruntlement on the part of some people who came from the non-Oromo communities was also a culmination of the daylong confrontation between some Oromo organizers of the event and other members of the Ethiopian communities in the Twin Cities. Because no Ethiopian flag was hung around the stage, which was entirely adorned with what the Oromo community calls the

resistance flag of Oromo people, the confrontation even invited the intervention of security guards of Target Center.

As the tension was still bubbling, the Prime Minister said that the wall was hit by a hammer in Washington, D.C., when he hugged artist Tamagn Beyene, and in his next tour to Los Angeles. What was then left for Minnesota to take care of, in Abiy Ahmed's words, were to clean the fragments of the broken wall. Hence, he invited the Oromo activist Jawar Mohammed who has been active, particularly in the recent Oromo protests that ground the nation to a halt using the Minnesota-based Oromo Media Network. Jawar, who was already seated on the stage, came forward and the two men hugged one another to "clean the fragments of the wall" that had been demolished in Washington and Los Angeles. They invited the rest of the delegation, including the first lady, to hold their hands together. All men held and raised their hands together. The first lady stayed behind the time and space of male politics of exuberance. The audience shouted with joy. The Prime Minister remembered and brought the first lady to the middle of the male delegation. When she joined the delegation and all held their hands in the air, people roared again in jubilation. Yet, as the gendered power relation was evident on the stage, the tensions were already bubbling on the floor. Once again the wreckage from the past was being cleared by male power. While I recognize the fact that a deeply divided Ethiopia, particularly its Manichean politics of "to be or not to be," demands a different consciousness, I would ask, what is the political in a performative staged by male-ethno/nationalist-bodies?

Both recent celebrations and their tensions show how the politics of primordial ethnicity continue to impact the language and actions of the *new* freedom. What do the male delegation (except the first lady) and the enactment of the breaking of the barrier through male bodies say about the articulation of freedom in this time-space? What does it mean to clean up the fragments from the space rather than thinking of them in dialectical terms so that their multifaceted contradictions would not be flattened out? Even though an answer to such demands another study, I would say that it shows how the politics of identity still haunts the present spatiotemporal relations, since nationalisms, in any of their forms, are still the guiding ethos of articulations of freedom. They make the languages of freedom deficient. Male bodies have become the epitome of the reconciliation with the past and the bridge that connects the present with the future. The cleaning of the fragments by these historically privileged bodies seems the eradication of dialectics.

These enactments and articulations of hope call for a critical look at the issue of building epistemic infrastructure as a work of love, critical conversation, and co-performance that accounts for intra-sectional, intersectional, and trans-sectional questions of class, capital, gender, sexuality, disability, etc. Notwithstanding the fact that the issue of ethnicity in Ethiopia was and is still important, the ways in which politics deploys history and narrates the past by valorizing and fossilizing a single category, namely ethno/nationalism, is detrimental in many ways and in many time-spaces. That is the argument I have made in the beginning of this dissertation.

Decolonial Co-creations

The mis/representation of the past on the basis of the ethnicity/class binary has been a mechanism used to create and to sustain a structure of belonging that can be conceived as a socialist-cum-neoliberal-heteropatriarchal regime. With the new development unfolding, the economic structure created through the developmental state model has built vast physical infrastructures, helping the TPLF in particular to create mega businesses. The fate of these companies, which used to be considered as an appendage of the state or revolutionary democratic force, is not yet known. They had enjoyed allocations of government rent at the expense of other public and private business organizations. Now it seems that TPLF's political defeat (at least in terms of losing total legitimacy, except in a very few regions) would adversely affect its previous dominance over the state's rent. Yet its uncanny relation with the state will continue to pose serious challenges given that it has built a vast economic power that the nation cannot wish away. The new huge privatization that the state launched complicates the problem.

In his inaugural speech, the new Prime Minister suggested that the developmental state model would continue to be the guiding economic program. However, EPRDF also announced, in news unprecedented in its history of economic programs, that it would privatize entirely or partially state owned factories and service-sector businesses, including the ones which the public built and in what it has invested for decades: telecommunication, electricity, railway, and sugar factories to name but a few. The huge privatization venture did not even spare Ethiopian Airlines, which has been hailed as

Africa's best carrier and has been profitable for consecutive years, even when the world economy has experienced tremendous stress.

One can see, however, that what instigates this huge 'opening' is also the economic crisis in Ethiopia. Both China (the longtime political ally and business partner of Ethiopia) and IMF have sent messages to Ethiopia that its debt is escalating at an alarming rate. Inflation, lack of foreign currency reserve, and unequal foreign exchange that affects businesses created the urgency to find any solution that would help the state not to face a total stalemate. Yet, despite its far-reaching implications, the decision did not take into account the recent peoples' struggles, did not seek any consultation (it is afterward that the government moved to form an advisory group), and did not explicate its program showing whether it is a strategy (a neoliberal resort) or a tactic (a negotiation of neoliberalism).

With no serious and constant public intellectual debate on these issues, with pervasive performance of ethnicity and development, Eurocentric colonial epistemology will continue to thrive. It seems that neoliberalism, formation of the middle-class society as a goal, and questions of ethno/nationalisms permeate the social, political, and artistic spaces. Languages of the poor have been re-appropriated, abused, and tainted to the extent that in Ethiopia a left lexicon such as revolutionary democracy would frighten people. There are a number of oppressive regimes that name and incarcerate yet remain unnamed and continue to reproduce repressive relations of production. All these require new languages, new visions of the human, new politics, new trans-genre poetics, critical co-performance, and embodied praxis in the everyday as evidenced in the three chapters

that have discussed the perils of historicist and colonial notion history, the paradoxical project of Ethiopian socialisms, the governmental mechanisms employed by and due to the conflict between global and local empires on the one hand and the female performers' tactical insurgencies and the everyday creative dramaturgy of resistance on the other.

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